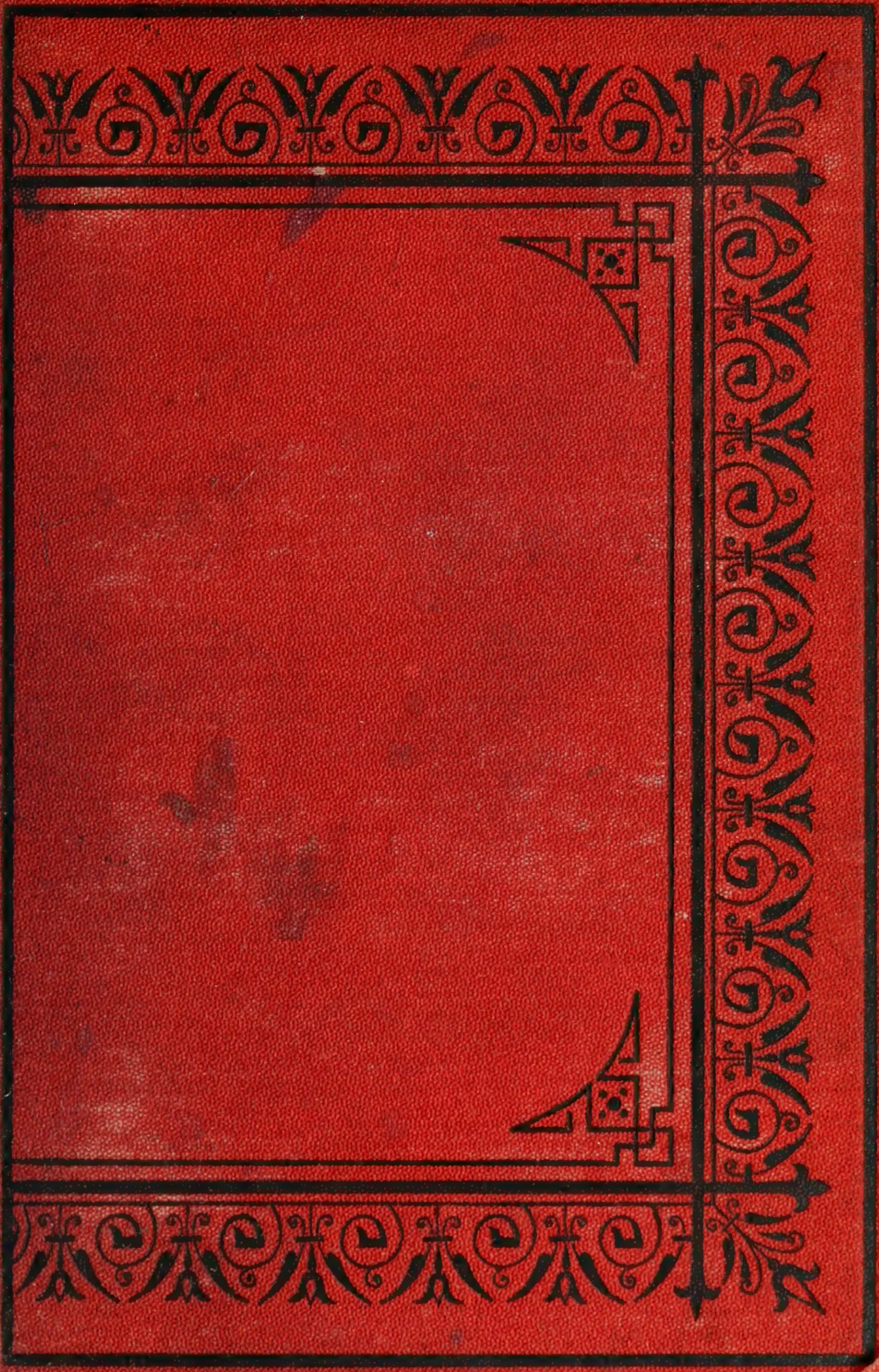

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NATHALIE;

A TALE.

INV. 1898.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "WOMAN IN FRANCE," "MADELEINE," ETC.

> A creature not too pure or good
> For human nature's daily food;
> For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
> Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.
> *Wordsworth.*

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,
549 & 551 BROADWAY.
1872.

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PREFACE.

The singular interpretations to which works of fiction are sometimes subject, render a Preface a matter of necessity.

In writing the following tale, I think it, therefore, necessary to state that I had no other definite object in view than to draw two very opposite characters, and show as truthfully as I could how those characters attracted, repelled, and influenced each other. I by no means intend to imply that these pages contain no other moral; I hope they do: but I cannot claim the merit of having made any peculiar moral my aim. A moral, unless when based on a very broad truth, seldom fails to prove fatal to works of art.

Such being the case, I make no apology for having chosen two very imperfect characters for my heroine and hero. I am too well aware of their deficiencies to imagine that they run any chance of being considered as models, or even of being mistaken as embodiments of the author's conceptions of moral beauty.

J. K.

NATHALIE.

CHAPTER I.

"Bring in the light, and tell Mademoiselle Nathalie that it is my desire to speak to her instantly."

Mademoiselle Dantin uttered her commands in a sharp, imperative tone. A timid-looking servant, in conical Norman cap, and short petticoats of startling fulness, vanished as if to hear were to obey, and the old schoolmistress stiffly sank back in her chair, with arms folded on her breast and a frown upon her brow.

It was a chill Norman evening—almost cool enough for England, and, in the deepening twilight, the room looked well-nigh dark. Through the narrow panes of a low glass door penetrated a faint gleam of lingering light, and the shadowy outlines of a few tall trees were dimly visible in the garden beyond. Thus seen, without light or fire, in the gathering gloom of evening, with pale maps and shadowy globes, long sombre curtains, and straight-backed chairs, the apartment looked most comfortless; but the withered features and rigid figure of Mademoiselle Dantin made her look by far the most dreary object it contained.

She was thin, wrinkled, and hard-favored; she wore no amiable look, nor was she very amiable in reality; being dogmatic and imperious, she rather liked teaching; it was power—authority, and turned out, moreover, to be as good a way as any of fastening her own peculiar opinions—more strongly marked than varied—on others. But then, as misfortune would have it, she had a decided antipathy to children and young girls, so that between her delight in the tuition and her general aversion for the objects taught—an aversion which, as usual, was most heartily returned—Mademoiselle Dantin and her pupils had rather an uncomfortable life of it, and might not have got on at all, had there happened to be another school and schoolmistress in the town of Sainville.

Sainville—we cannot advise the reader to look for it on the map—is a quiet little place buried in the very bosom of Normandy. This province is perhaps the prettiest, and certainly is the greenest nook in all the pleasant land of France. It has many low hills, many shallow little valleys, with bright glancing streams and a clear blue sky; above all, it has picturesque old towns of quaint and venerable aspect, that seize on the imagination with a peculiar and mysterious charm. Dark, lonely, and rather misanthropic-looking, these quiet places contrast strikingly with the cheerful verdure and soft pastoral beauty of the surrounding scenery; they look like morose hermits, who have at least chosen pleasant spots wherein to do penance. But though their quaintness strikes the eye, and their monastic gloom awakes the fancy, they are cold and cheerless—they cannot win the heart; we feel that there life glides away in too dull and monotonous a flow; we look, wonder, linger for a while in narrow, winding streets, with crazy wooden houses rising high on either side, and then pass on, feeling we have left a human prison behind us.

Sainville was one of those little moral islands; it had no trade, no commerce, no life, and was, moreover, shut out from the great and busy world by a barrier of aristocratic châteaux rising on the slope of the surrounding declivities, or enjoying the shade and silence of the neighboring valleys. In these luxurious abodes, life was as gay and pleasant as heart could wish, and some of the best of French society could make it. Balls, plays, concerts, fishing excursions, and hunting parties, seemed to be ever renewing for the amusement of the privileged owners and guests of the châteaux. Many a time did the inhabitants of Sainville, who all belonged to the smaller bourgeoisie, and who had not wealth, importance, or talent to rise above their station, comment, with the puritanic severity of the excluded, on the sin and folly transacted in those abodes whence ever proceeded the sounds of merriment and pleasure; and many a time did they grumble more morosely still, when wakened in the early morning by some gay cavalcade clattering away along the silent streets.

This exclusion, in which she shared like her fellow citizens, had not improved the mind or temper of Mademoiselle Dantin She had accustomed herself to think of nothing save her school, its propriety, its ceremonious routine, above all its immaculate purity; and on this subject she had grown to be somewhat severe and irritable. She was so in a peculiar degree on the day when this story opens. This was, however, a day which generally found and left her in a singular state of good humor, being neither more nor less than that appointed for the annual distribution of prizes among her pupils. On the morning of this eventful ceremony the room had been hung with white draperies, ornamented with green wreaths. Mademoiselle Dantin opened the proceedings by seating herself on a sort of throne erected at the upper end of the room, from which elevated position she looked down triumphantly on the curled heads and white robes of the pupils, who demurely sat in rows in the centre of the apartment, whilst their friends and relatives formed a semicircle around them. After making a little speech, Mademoiselle Dantin. holding an eye-glass in her right hand, and a paper in her left, sententiously read aloud the names of the pupils on whom she had resolved to confer the distinction of a prize. Each of the girls thus designated then left her place and walked up to a tight, lively-looking little gentleman, in a dark wig, the professor of dancing, who sat alone between two tables, one covered with books, the other with wreaths, took from his hands the volume adjudged to her, and stooped to receive the laurel wreath which, with prompt and courteous grace, he rose to place on her head, whilst delighted papas and mammas shed tears. and Mademoiselle Dantin looked on and felt in her glory. When there were no more prizes or wreaths to give, Mademoiselle Dantin rose, and the company dispersed, the children all going home for their holidays. As soon as every one had departed, the schoolmistress gave prompt orders for the taking down of hangings and wreaths: in a few minutes all was over; the room was empty, the walls were bare, and the school, instead of being filled with the murmuring hum of pupils conning over their lessons, fell into a deep and unnatural stillness, destined to last six weeks. But though the ceremony had passed off in the best possible manner, the triumph of this day was soon clouded by a discovery which filled the mind of the schoolmistress with indignant wrath. What that discovery was will be seen farther on.

A few minutes had elapsed since she had, in a tone of omi nous severity, given, with regard to the appearance of "Mademoiselle Nathalie," the order recorded in the first lines of this chapter, when the door of the room where she sat opened, and Marianne, the servant, entered, bearing a lighted tallow candle in an old plated candlestick, which she placed on the table before her mistress.

"Well?" observed Mademoiselle Dantin, with inquiring sharpness.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie is not in her room," was the low reply.

"Not in her room! and what is she allowed a room of her own for unless to be in it?" exclaimed the schoolmistress, with subdued irritation.

"Perhaps she's gone to breathe a little fresh air in the garden," timidly suggested Marianne.

"Not at this hour, Marianne," majestically replied Mademoiselle Dantin; "no, I will not admit that any member of my establishment, however faulty in other respects," she feelingly added, "could, against my well-known rule, be out in the garden at this hour."

"Shall I go and see, madame?"

"No, Marianne, I cannot allow that; to allow it would be to admit such a thing as possible, and this I never will; look for her in the class."

Marianne silently left the room, but the door did not close behind her. For the head and wig of the "Professor" who had played so important a part in the morning's ceremony, suddenly made their appearance in the dark aperture, smiled and nodded at Mademoiselle Dantin with mingled familiarity and respect, and lisped in a tone of soft entreaty: "May I come in?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier, you may come in," replied the schoolmistress, half rising from her seat; her tone was gracious and mollified, and a faint smile passed over her faded face. Thus encouraged, the Chevalier, a middle-aged little man with a thin, sallow visage, quick eyes, and an aquiline nose, entered the room with erect bearing and elastic tread. He was proceeding to shut the door with a prompt decision natural to him, when Mademoiselle Dantin shook her head and admonishingly observed:

"The door, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"Ah! yes, the door," he sighed, and left it open.

"Rules must be obeyed," continued the schoolmistress.

"Yes, rules must be obeyed," answered the Chevalier, repressing a shiver as the keen draught came full upon him.

It was a rule in Mademoiselle Dantin's establishment for no lady to converse with a gentleman, not her father or brother, in a closed room. The mistress was the first to set the example, and obey the rule in all its severity. To say the truth, she generally sat facing the door; and the male visitor, whoever he might be, had his back turned to it, so that all the hardship of this rule could not be said to fall upon her; but what gentleman would complain, when feminine modesty was at stake? assuredly not so devoted a squire of dames as the Chevalier Théodore de Méranville-Louville.

No mummery ever yet existed without some special adviser or other in male shape, and what a father confessor might have been to an abbess and her gentle sisterhood, the Chevalier was to Mademoiselle Dantin and her fair pupils. He was the only individual of his sex attached to the establishment, for the salic law still holds good with regard to the tuition of dancing. To this law Mademoiselle Dantin, who, if she could, would have effaced the masculine gender from dictionary and grammar, very indignantly submitted. But the gentle blood of the Chevalier, who, though of an impoverished family, had an authentic claim to the noble names he bore, and his title of Knight of the Legion of Honor, bestowed upon him for saving a drowning man, but which many considered a government reward for his invention of a new *pas*, called the Sainville *pas*, a rumor he rather favored—above all, his chivalrous devotedness to the fair sex, had conquered the antipathy and subdued the obdurate heart of the schoolmistress. Woman was indeed sacred as woman to the gallant little Chevalier; he cherished a platonic and universal passion for the whole sex, and reverenced a petticoat in its earliest and latest stages; he believed neither in little girls nor in aged dames; he took off his hat to young ladies of six, and flirted with ladies of sixty, and did both with equal grace. But though thus gentle to those whom he called "earthly angels," the Chevalier was to his own sex stern and somewhat haughty.

Having taken the seat which Mademoiselle Dantin condescendingly designated, the Chevalier could not but notice the gloom which overshadowed the features of the fair schoolmistress. In a neat little speech, he immediately expressed his sympathy with the regret she naturally felt at the temporary separation between herself and her beloved pupils Mademoiselle Dantin tossed her head.

"As if I cared for the little flirts!" she said, almost indignantly.

The Chevalier looked distressed. Flirts! there were no flirts in his creed.

"A set of forward coquettes!" continued she.

"Oh! Madame!" he exclaimed, raising his hands imploringly.

"And of deceitful minxes, as all girls are," she persisted

The Chevalier was shocked. He gently endeavored to remonstrate, and ventured to remind her, "That though women were tender flowers at every age, they were frail, very frail rosebuds in their youth."

"Well, then, one of the rosebuds is going to get a nipping," retorted Mademoiselle Dantin, looking as dark and chill as a wintry breeze.

She rang the bell as she spoke, and Marianne promptly made her appearance.

"Is Mademoiselle Nathalie coming or not?" asked the schoolmistress.

"Yes, madame; she said she would come directly."

"Pray where did you find her?"

The girl hesitated.

"In the garden, reading," she replied at length.

Mademoiselle Dantin rose.

"Chevalier," she said, with great state, "be good enough to leave me. I have a duty to perform;—an act of justice and authority to exercise. I must be alone."

The Chevalier rose, looked dismayed, but retired on tiptoe, without so much as remonstrating. He knew that Mademoiselle Dantin's justice was always administered privately, and with a strictness of secrecy that, like the Vehmgericht, only rendered it more awful to the apprehension of the uninitiated.

"What has our pretty southern flower done?" he poetically inquired, as Marianne closed the door and followed him out; but the girl only shook her head in reply, and seemed struck with consternation.

As soon as she was alone, Mademoiselle Dantin walked up to the glass door that led into the garden, and stood there for a few seconds, peering through the narrow panes with sharp attention. There was a peculiar smile on her face as she turned away and resumed her seat. Scarcely had she done so when the glass door opened. The schoolmistress heard it very well, but did not choose to look up; a light step glided in, still she remained motionless and grim, looking straight before her. It is the culprit that must seek the glance of the judge, and not the judge that must look at the culprit. Mademoiselle Dantin was a true Normande, litigious in spirit, and versed in legal knowledge; besides the rules which she mercilessly imposed on others, she had certain rules for her own use, which she rigidly obeyed: one of these rules was to give a judicial form to almost every thing she did.

"Did you wish to speak with me, madame?" asked a clear, cheerful voice at her elbow.

The schoolmistress made no reply, but slowly raised her head, and turned it with a keen and severe glance in the direction whence the voice had proceeded. A handsome, slender girl of seventeen or eighteen years of age, very simply attired in black, but dark-haired, dark-eyed, and with animated features of southern symmetry, was standing by her side. This was Nathalie Montolieu, chief and only resident teacher in the establishment of Mademoiselle Dantin.

She was scarcely above the middle height of woman, but of a light and erect figure. Freedom and careless grace marked her look, her bearing, and her attitude, even whilst she stood there quietly by the chair of the old schoolmistress. As she turned slightly to hear Mademoiselle Dantin's expected reply, with an air too easy to be dignified, but not free from the quick, impatient pride of youth, the light which fell full on her whole person, leaving all dark behind it, gave to the outline of her graceful figure, and to her clear and well-defined profile a vivid distinctness, still further heightened by the shadowy background of the ill-lit room. The brow open and poetic, with wavy hair braided back; the dark eyes soft and deep through all their fire; the short upper lip and curved chin told a daughter of the sunny south; and the innate southern grace of her half-averted head and listening attitude would have been the very desire of a sculptor's eye. Yet hers was not the still beauty of cold art; it had the light from within which is to a countenance as is the lambent flame to the alabaster lamp in which it burns; the warm ray which reveals, though it may not create, its beauty. And in her that ray seemed, from the ever-varying expression of her mobile features, to burn with a light as changeful as it was clear. She had not the soothing and almost divine calm of perfect loveliness. Her beauty charmed because it was so human with the light and bloom of youth, and all the genial warmth of her ripening years. It was neither serene nor angel-like, but fervent and living; not ideal, though highly poetic.

Indeed, to look upon her as she stood there, to see her intelligent forehead and arched eyebrows, to meet her look, gentle though fearless, and seldom veiled by drooping eyelids, to mark the flexibility, denoting both courage and a temper easily moved, of her delicately chiselled features, above all to note the light, capricious smile of her sensitive and half-parted lips, —these lips of the south averse to silence, and which express so quickly and so significantly frankness, impatience, good-humored raillery, or angry disdain,—was to know her as one in whom blended both the highest and the weakest attributes of an imaginative and impulsive woman; from the energy, passion, and devotion of the heart to the caprice and endless mobility of temper destined to render life as changeful as an April day.

"Did you wish to speak to me?" she asked again, in a quick, impatient tone, which rendered the fulness of her southern voice and its rapid accent still more apparent.

She glanced down somewhat impatiently as she spoke, and the life and warm coloring of her whole countenance contrasted strikingly with the stony look and pale, rigid features of Mademoiselle Dantin.

"I did wish to speak to you; I sent for you for that express purpose, and you will soon know why," replied the schoolmistress, in the long, nasal drawl of Normandy; "but first, may I ask why, against my express rule, you were out in the garden at this late hour?"

"I did not think the rule applied to the holidays," quietly replied the young girl.

"Then I beg to inform you that it does."

An expression of much annoyance passed over the features of Nathalie, but she subdued it, and merely said, "Very well, madame."

"Indeed," resumed Mademoiselle Dantin, "I think it strange that you should like the garden at this hour, and I should feel inclined to make some remarks on the subject, did I not remember that as a Provençal, that is to say, a native of that southern part of France which has never been remarkable for the observance of feminine propriety, you are entitled to indulgence."

A kindling light passed in the dark eyes of the southern girl, but the schoolmistress never noticed it, and resumed in the same ceremonious, legal tone:

"May I ask what you were doing in the garden at this late hour?"

"I was reading."

"Some pernicious romance, of course. Must I ever keep telling you that it is dangerous and improper to feed your mind with the absurdities which abound in such works? Must I keep assuring you that no character is so ridiculous as that of a romantic young lady?"

"Romantic!" echoed Nathalie, with a gesture of impatience; "and what has one in my position to be romantic about, madame? The realities of my life are surely sufficient to drive all romance away."

"True. Besides, you are so sensible and so prudent. Will you favor me, however, with the name of the book you were reading?

"It was a very harmless book."

"Was it a fiction?"

"An innocent one at least."

"Which was, of course, the reason why you hid it in your pocket before coming in?" said the school-mistress, closing up her thin lips with an ironical smile, and triumphantly straightening her meagre neck.

Nathalie gave her a quick look, dropped her eyes, and smiled demurely.

"I assure you, madame," she slowly observed, "that the book is a harmless book. Interesting, however, for the character of the hero, though somewhat stern, is original and striking. I confess I like him; the whole story is, no doubt, melo-dramatic, but——"

"How did you get it?" interrupted Mademoiselle Dantin, with a sort of sudden jerk in her look and speech, which she held infallible for the detection of deceit.

"I found it in the garden, where it had been left by one of the pupils," quietly answered the young girl.

"One of the pupils? Good Heavens! And this is what goes on in spite of all my vigilance. Give me that book, Mademoiselle Montolieu; give me that book," she repeated, with a sort of desperate calmness that seemed to say she was quite ready to obtain it, no matter what the cost might be.

Nathalie smiled again, this time rather scornfully, but the book was produced and laid on the table. Mademoiselle Dantin took up the volume, drew the light nearer, looked, and laying down the book, gave the young teacher a glance of indignant wrath.

The dangerous fiction was a volume of romantic fairy tales Nathalie's face beamed with pleasure and mischief as she met Mademoiselle Dantin's look of exasperation; but the lady soon recovered, and merely observed in a sharp key:

"I really wonder, Mademoiselle Montolieu, you will persist in losing your time with such foolish reading."

"I took up the book by chance. I fell on a story which, I acknowledge it, interested me. The chief character, though dark, is not without a mysterious power of attraction."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," inquired the schoolmistress, with slow and dignified amazement, "do you imagine I asked you to come here in order to hear your opinion of a fairy tale? You are guilty of the strangest absurdities! I suppose ladies in the south talk in that heedless, flighty manner. Remember that in Normandy it will not do. I beg, therefore, that you will—if it is indeed possible—restrain your southern vivacity for a few moments. May I ask if you remember the conditions we made when you entered this house three years ago?"

"I remember. I was to teach French, music, geography."

"I do not speak of that."

"History, arithmetic, &c., for the sum of three hundred francs a year."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, you wilfully misunderstand me."

"Board and lodging included."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, folding her arms, "will you be so good as to remain silent."

Nathalie looked all innocence, but a furtive smile lurked around the corners of her mouth.

"If I spoke, madame," she composedly replied, "it was because you asked if I remembered the conditions."

"I alluded to moral conditions; not to those paltry conditions of money, board, and lodging, on which your mind is always running."

"And yet, madame, you say I am romantic."

"The moral part which passed between us when you entered this house three years ago," resumed Mademoiselle Dantin, without heeding the young teacher's last remark, and closing her eyes to speak with more effect, "related to the morality, the propriety, the purity,——"

"I think I had better take a seat to hear you," quietly observed Nathalie, and she took one as she spoke, seating herself so as to receive the full benefit of the awful glance the schoolmistress immediately directed towards her But the young girl, leaning her elbow on the table, and resting her chin on the palm of her left hand, eyed her stern mistress without impertinence, though very composedly. Her look, always expressive, was now particularly so; it said in plain language: "I have been called in for a quarrel—I know it—I am used to it; I have tried to avoid it, but since I cannot, go on; I am ready."

Mademoiselle Dantin resumed:

"The moral part or series of moral conditions—I hold part to be quite as correct an expression, but shall use 'series' for the sake of clearness—the series of moral conditions I alluded to bore reference to the propriety, the purity, the womanly reserve of your conduct."

"In what have I failed?" asked Nathalie, with an impetuosity that showed patience did not rank amongst her peculiar virtues.

"Strict womanly propriety and discretion." continued the shoolmistress, "were to be your chief attributes. Without modesty ——"

A flush crossed the brow of Nathalie; her voice trembled as she spoke:

"Your hints are becoming insulting. Madame, beware!"

"If you had condescended to hear me to the end," said Mademoiselle Dantin, with irritating coolness, "there would have been no necessity for this unfeminine burst of temper. And this reminds me of another remark I wish to make to you: you are in Normandy, not in Provence; pray remember it. You must please to drop that rapid and startling mode of speech, to talk a little lower, to laugh less, and to keep your southern blood and temper rather more under your control. What may have been only an agreeable vivacity in your native province, is unladylike and repulsive here."

Nathalie eyed her very quietly.

"You were talking about modesty," she said, in a tone calm enough for the most phlegmatic Normande.

"I was, and if you will be so good as not to interrupt me I mean to give you a definition of that virtue. Modesty I conceive to be the strict guard which a woman of principle keeps over her looks and demeanor with persons of the opposite sex. In that reserve you have failed."

"How so?" asked Nathalie, whose voice had already lost some of its calmness.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," frigidly observed the school mistress, "I have begged, I now implore you not to interrupt me. I will tell you how you have failed: you are vain; you think yourself handsome; you flirt, as well as you can, with every man you meet. Oh! you need not give me that basilisk look; it is so. Your alluring ways in a certain quarter have not escaped me. If you were only ambitious, I should not mind; but the immodesty of the thing revolts me."

"For heaven's sake, madame," exclaimed Nathalie, tapping her foot with uncontrollable impatience, "be so good as to say at once the ill-natured thing you have been aiming at all along."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," reproachfully said the schoolmistress, "have you really no idea of that beautiful feminine composure which subdues the manifestation of every thing approaching emotion? If you would only remember that the most bitter quarrel can and ought to be conducted like a logical discussion; if, instead of speaking in that vehement way, you had only said quietly, 'Will you be so good, madame, as to come to the point?' or something of the kind. Mademoiselle Montolieu," she feelingly added, "there is a form in every thing, and your want of form will break my heart."

She looked and felt distressed. If she tormented Nathalie, the young teacher certainly tormented her almost as much. They were antipathetic by nature, temperament, and birth; theirs was the old quarrel of the northern and southern races, —a quarrel which has endured for ages, and will endure ages still. The schoolmistress kept the teacher because she was full of intelligence and talent, and much loved by the pupils; the teacher remained because she was poor and needed a home. The Dantin discipline had failed to subdue her vivacity of spirit and temper; she was still the gay and yet ardent Provençal girl, with all the fire and impulsiveness of her race. But though to others she might seem like the beauties of a kindred land, with

> Heart on her lips and soul within her eyes,
> Soft as her clime, and sunny as her skies;

the unhappy schoolmistress, who felt like the keeper of some young and half-wild thing, unhesitatingly pronounced her a proud, passionate, vindictive southern, who would never know any thing about the beauties of feminine propriety.

After a moody pause, she now abruptly observed:

"May I ask how long you have been acquainted with our neighbor?"

"What neighbor?" inquired Nathalie, with evident surprise.

"Our next-door neighbor. I ask you how long you have been acquainted with him?"

"I have seen him at a distance, but never spoken to him. I think your question strange."

"No matter. Will you be good enough to be frank for once, and tell me what you know of our neighbor?"

Nathalie looked irritated beyond measure at this pertinacity, but she controlled herself, and replied:

"I know nothing of Monsieur de Sainville, save that he is, as you say, our next-door neighbor,—a gentleman of ancient birth and large property. I have seen him once or twice at a distance, and should not even know him again; I care nothing about him. I scorn your insinuations."

Her face grew flushed as she spoke.

"She scorns my insinuations!" ejaculated the schoolmistress; "scorns what insinuations?" she added resignedly. "I am not aware I made any with regard to Monsieur de Sainville."

Nathalie looked round, to see her better.

"On whom, then," she abruptly said, "do you accuse me of practising my powers of seduction?"

"Your powers of seduction!" indignantly echoed Mademoiselle Dantin, who detected the disdainful curl of the lip with which the words had been uttered; "I certainly did not accuse you of practising what you thus unblushingly allude to on Monsieur de Sainville,—a grave, experienced man, on whom girlish arts or graces are not very likely to take effect. I was not alluding to him, though of course you did not know this, but to his nephew,—Monsieur Charles Marceau."

"Oh! his nephew," slowly repeated Nathalie.

"Yes; but of course you do not know him; of course you have never seen or met him, though he lives next door; of course you do not linger in the garden in the evening in order to be seen or admired by him—oh, no!"

"I was not prepared," ironically replied Nathalie, "to find my evening walks thus interpreted; but let it be a comfort to you to reflect that the garden wall is high enough in all reason to protect M. Charles Marceau."

"You need not say that with that triumphant look," re turned the schoolmistress, fairly exasperated; your beauty is not quite so dangerous as all that; as for garden-walls, their height is of little consequence when servants can be bribed to convey messages or letters."

"Madame," said Nathalie, in a low tone, "I am not patient by nature; I believe you know it; I warn you that on some points, and this is one, I will not be patient. I exact that you unsay what you have said, or give me proof that it is true."

She spoke in a subdued key, but with more real anger and haughtiness than she had yet displayed.

"Proof," answered Mademoiselle Dantin, with a smile of conscious triumph; "pray what do you call this?"

She drew forth a letter from her pocket as she spoke, placed it on the table before Nathalie, and significantly laid the forefinger of her right hand upon it, like one who had all along been preparing her little *coup de théâtre*, and knew its value well.

"Nathalie looked surprised, but took up the letter and read it without any apparent sign of emotion.

"Well," said she, coolly laying it down again, "what about that letter, madame?"

Mademoiselle Dantin clasped her hands, turned up her eyes, and shook her head.

"The next thing," said she, with wrathful calmness, "will be that you will declare your right to receive such letters. Or maybe I do you injustice, maybe you do not see the impropriety, because your extreme innocence prevents you from understanding such matters. Poor little thing! she reads fairy tales in the garden."

Nathalie eyed her with a firm, clear glance.

"My innocence," said she, very calmly, "is guarded by something more powerful and secure than ignorance. I for one shall not feign to misunderstand that which is as clear as day. By sight, at least, I know well the person who wrote this letter; the nephew of our proud neighbor. I have met him not once but many times. He has followed me when I have gone to see my sister Rose, down in Sainville, and he has stood at a distance when I took the pupils for a walk on the road to Marmont. When I have been in the garden of this house, he has generally been on the terrace of his uncle's garden by which it is overlooked. I confess that I have not given up going to Sainville, or walking into the country, pro tected by the presence of twenty persons. I have not given up walking in the garden protected by a substantial wall. And now, madame, you know as much as I do of the encouragement given by me to this M. Charles Marceau, who, after honoring me with impertinent attentions, honors me with a still more impertinent declaration of what I must, I suppose, call his love."

"At which I dare say you felt very much offended when you received it," sneered Mademoiselle Dantin.

"It is no doubt very presumptuous for me to be offended at any thing," replied Nathalie, with some bitterness, "but that is not the question. When I asked for proofs of your accusations, you produced this letter. You now say, 'When you received it:' I beg to say that I received it from your hands for the first time."

"I found it in your room, in your drawer," said the schoolmistress, severely.

"And pray," asked Nathalie, angrily, looking up, "what took you to my room, or made you look into my drawers?"

For a moment Mademoiselle Dantin seemed embarrassed, but for a moment only.

"It was my duty," she confidently replied: "I suspected, I knew there was something wrong."

"But the letter was sealed; you broke the seal, and accuse me of having read it first. I do not mean to say that I should not have read it, but I would have mentioned the matter to you to complain of the insolent servant who had become the messenger of this vain and presumptuous young man."

"Admitting that you have not read this letter," inflexibly resumed the schoolmistress," it is still disgraceful to have received it. Such a thing never before happened in my establishment. This letter would never have been addressed to a strictly modest female. Men, bad as they are, do not act without some encouragement. But there are artful, designing creatures, ever ready to draw into their nets any silly young man of family and fortune. I owe it to the character of my house to suffer no such persons in it. I consent to bury the past in oblivion," she added, with a magnanimous bend of the head; "but on the express and clearly understood condition, that certain individuals I need not mention by name, will henceforth observe that purity and reserve which ought to characterize their sex. Should this timely hint fail in its effect, a disreputable dismissal must inevitably be the conse quence. Such were the remarks I wished to offer to you, Mademoiselle Montolieu. And now I have a few accounts to settle, you may retire."

Nathalie rose; her slender figure was drawn up, her cheeks crimsoned with shame, then grew pale with indignant anger; her dark eyes were dilated and flashed proudly; her lip curled with disdain; ire was in her bearing, her accent, and her look, as she spoke.

"Madame!" said she, with the passionate vehemence natural to her, and which she now no longer strove to repress, "I have resided three years under your roof; I have during that time been tasked beyond endurance,—been daily insulted and oppressed. Never, however, did you dare to venture so far as you have ventured to-day. I scorn your insinuations; they are false, mean, and you know it well. You threaten to tarnish my name; know, then, that strong in the sense of my own purity, I defy both your power and you."

There was a deep silence. Mademoiselle Dantin changed color, and from pale turned yellow; then bit her lips, and said in a quivering voice:

"Mademoiselle, after this insolent speech, I need not observe that you must cease to belong to my establishment. In a month you leave."

Nathalie haughtily bent her head in token of assent, turned away, and opening the glass door, stepped out into the garden followed by the angry and lowering glance of the schoolmistress.

* * *

CHAPTER II.

The evening, though chill, was clear. The moon had risen in the east, and her calm light fell over the narrow garden. A wide beech-tree spread its sombre yet graceful masses in the shade, whilst its silvery trunk and foremost boughs received the slanting and tremulous rays of the moon. Beyond rose a group of slender poplars, distinct and dark on the cloudless sky, and casting their long line of waving shadow on the green sward, now of a pale gray hue, in the cool moonlight.

Nathalie was bare-headed and lightly clad, but she did not heed the cool and penetrating breeze which fanned her fevered brow. She had entered the garden because it was the nearest place to which she could escape from Mademoiselle Dantin's presence; she now remained in it, regardless of the faint mist which rose from every group of trees or mass of shrub, and of the falling dew which made the grass damp beneath her feet. She walked along, not knowing whither she went, her cheek still burning, her warm blood still flowing in a more free and rapid tide, her whole being roused and excited by the spirit of indignant defiance. Her mind was crowded with tumultuous thoughts and feelings. The sense of freedom won and triumph achieved predominated. She went on in a sort of dream, unconscious of any thing around her, exulting recklessly over her dearly-bought independence. She paused on reaching the garden wall, and this simple physical barrier subdued at once her haughty mood. She turned back, and slowly retraced her steps, with a grave and altered mien. A wooden bench stood in the deep shadow of the beech-tree, she lingered for awhile near it, motionless and pensive, and at length sat down, looking before her in the same abstracted mood.

The garden of Mademoiselle Dantin was a mere grassy slope, extending at the back of the low and white-walled school-house. The parlor which Nathalie had left, looked almost dark, and a solitary light burned upstairs in the sleeping room of the pupils, for a few still remained in vacation time. She abstractedly watched their shadows moving to and fro across the curtains, until the light was suddenly extinguished, and the whole building relapsed into gloom. Beyond the school, at some distance from it and on a commanding eminence, stood the château of Sainville, a gray, turreted, lordly-looking mansion, embosomed in stately repose, amidst a dark mass of firs and evergreens, over which the moon now hung mild and pale in the deep blue sky of evening.

The château was, however, by no means a large edifice. Although flanked by stone turrets capped with the conical slate roofs so frequently met with in Normandy, it had evidently never been intended as a place of feudal strength. The light and graceful porch, the ornamental façade, belonged to the style of the *Renaissance*, and showed it to be what it really was,—an elegant and luxurious abode, no more. But if the edifice did not lead back the beholder's mind to those far times when stern barons remained aloof in their fortress holds, it possessed a charm and stateliness of its own. The days of the gay and chivalrous Francis the First returned with the light and sculptured balconies, with the paved court and marble vases, with the broad lawn, the garden terraces, and the sweeping avenues of the surrounding grounds. It was such a dwelling as the royal lover might, in a fond mood, have bestowed on Diana of Poictiers; a place well suited to the courtly revels of a period celebrated for its wealth, magnificence, and voluptuous art. It had indeed been erected under the reign of that gay prince by a Sire de Sainville, whose escutcheon, with the motto, *ung seul desir*, was conspicuously displayed over the whole building. This "only desire" was said by some to have been the possession of a certain beautiful damsel; others asserted that it alluded to the remarkable firmness or obstinacy hereditary in the blood of the Sainvilles. Of this peculiarity the last descendant of that ancient race, who was also the actual owner of the château, had, according to general report, given abundant proof. Left alone in extreme youth with a broken patrimony, and a name tarnished by the profligacy and extravagance of his father, he had gone to foreign lands, engaged in successful speculations, and, after many years of arduous toil, lately returned in the possession of considerable wealth, with which he had satisfied the creditors of his father, effaced the stain of bankruptcy from his escutcheon, and repurchased his paternal mansion and estates. Little was known of his character, save the pertinacity of purpose indicated by this trait. Nathalie had heard him described as a grave and severe man, of cold and haughty manners. Such he had seemed to her when she had seen him at a distance. She now gazed on the small, though handsome château as it rose before her in the moonlight, with a feeling akin to bitterness. A son of that house, conscious of superior rank and wealth, had thought fit to press on her attentions which he would never have presumed to offer to a woman of a higher station. The consequence to her of this caprice was to cast her unfriended and alone on a world of which she knew nothing, save that it was harsh and severe to the poor.

Passing her hand across her brow, Nathalie endeavored to banish the gloomy thoughts her position suggested. But she could not do so. The mood which had urged her to defy Mademoiselle Dantin, which had made her rejoice in her liberty, was over. She was free, true; but she felt she had exchanged the imperious rule of one mistress for that of another more tyrannical still, Poverty. There had been a time when the meaning of this word was to her like a dream—poverty in the warm south is divested of half its horrors—but she understood it now. This had been a hard lesson to learn for one whose natural temper was as genial and sunny as her own Provence. Brought up by an old relative in almost unrestrained liberty, she had suddenly found herself cast, by the death of that relative, on her own resources. A half-sister, residing in Sainville, had procured her the situation of teacher in Mademoiselle Dantin's school. The change from the south to the north, from freedom to dependence and routine, from affection to freezing indifference, had thrown a chill upon the young girl's temper, from which it had never recovered. The shade of doubt had fallen on her hopeful faith; the time was gone when she could feel in herself the native buoyancy that subdues apprehension and fear. The more genial the temper, the more it will dread and feel loneliness, and Nathalie was alone; she had no relatives, save her half-sister, a dependant like herself; no friends, and no money. There were no other schools in the little town of Sainville, one of the most insignificant places in all Normandy; no families she could enter as governess; no pupils she could teach, save those who came to Mademoiselle Dantin's. Her future looked so blank and so dreary that her heart involuntarily sank within her. "What on earth shall I do?" she asked herself, with an inward shudder. One moment she thought of making her submission to the schoolmistress, but her whole pride rose against it. Any fate seemed preferable to that humiliation.

A low, grating sound near her aroused Nathalie from these reflections. She started to her feet, and turned round hurriedly, with a vague consciousness of the nature of that sound, and of the spot whence it proceeded. No building intervened between the château of Sainville and the school; a wall separated the wide grounds of the one from the narrow garden of the other; the little tenement now occupied by Mademoiselle Dantin had formerly belonged to the gardener of the late Monsieur de Sainville, and the strip of land attached to it had been the kitchen garden of the great house. A door of communication still existed between the two gardens; it stood within a few steps of the beech-tree, and, though she knew that it was always carefully locked on Mademoiselle Dantin's side, Nathalie now felt certain that from it proceeded the sounds she had heard.

She turned round—it was so: the door was opening slowly and cautiously; a stranger, in whom she had no difficulty to recognize Charles Marceau, stepped in, and, leaving the door ajar, turned quietly towards her, apparently neither abashed nor discomposed at the audacity of his intrusion. Nathalie looked at him silently, petrified with amazement. He returned her look, and like her did not speak, as if willing to give her time to recover. Although she had frequently met him, Nathalie had never yet beheld her admirer so nearly; and notwithstanding her anger, surprise, and irritation, she could not help scanning him with a rapid and scrutinizing glance.

Charles Marceau was scarcely above the middle height. with a slight but well-knit frame. He looked upwards of twenty-five; he was in reality some years younger, but his features, though remarkably handsome, were thin, sallow, and careworn. Nathalie was struck with their sharp decisive outlines, as he stood before her on the moonlit sward, his glance fixed upon her, and his pale countenance, half turned towards her, rendered more pale by the dark mass of hair which fell around it. The look which she gave him lasted but a moment; the next she turned away, and was stepping into the path that led to the school, when, by a sudden and dexterous movement, the young man anticipated her, and, though scarcely appearing to do so intentionally, effectually impeded her passage by standing before her.

"I hope," said he, in a respectful tone, and in a low, though singularly harmonious voice, "that I have not alarmed you."

Nathalie had turned to give him a quick, fearless look; the silent curl of her lip spoke of a feeling very different from fear.

"I see you are deeply offended," he resumed, eyeing her attentively; "be so good——"

'Be so good as to let me pass," sharply said Nathalie.

"But one word, and I depart," he humbly continued. "Did you receive my letter?"

"Ay, sir, from the hands of Mademoiselle Dantin."

A slight raising of the eyebrow, a brief projection of the nether lip, and the word "Indeed!" cooly uttered, were the only marks of surprise or annoyance the young man manifested.

"Then I suppose the girl has betrayed me, after all," he composedly observed, casting an inquiring glance towards Nathalie.

Her color rose; she looked as if she would give him an annihilating reply; then drew back, turning her head away as if in scorn of speech. She would have moved on; once more he stepped before her and spoke, but now with downcast look and beseeching tone.

"Do not—pray do not turn away so indignantly. Allow me but one word more. Did that letter offend you?"

"No questions, sir," said Nathalie, angrily; "leave me ere I summon assistance."

Her tone was indignant, though subdued. The young man met her irritated glance as she stood close by him in the clear moonlight, pausing ere she once more endeavored to pass by; he marked the angry flush which crimsoned her cheek and brow, and his own countenance expressed more vexation and surprise than alarm at the threat she had issued.

"Nay, heaven forbid you should be placed under any such necessity," he somewhat sharply replied; "could I have formed some other method of meeting you, I would never have adopted this. But remember, you seldom go out; you are always accompanied; I may look, but never speak; if I write, my letters are seized. Was I then to trust to chance, or presumptuously hope that, meeting me so often, you would at length guess why I ever lingered around your path?"

He had begun almost haughtily, but his voice had a low and harmonious cadence as he concluded.

"Will you let me pass, or not?" imperatively asked Nathalie.

He bit his lip, but bowed and stepped back a few paces in silent humility. Nathalie very unceremoniously passed by him; he followed, observing, in a low apologetic tone:

"Believe me, but for the tyranny of Mademoiselle Dantin, I should never——"

"Go on, sir, go on," exclaimed a shrill and exasperated voice behind him; "it is charming to hear you. I am delighted, Mademoiselle Montolieu, to find you so pleasantly engaged."

Charles Marceau turned round hastily. Mademoiselle Dantin, who had approached, unheard and unseen, was standing close by him. For a moment, the young man looked disturbed. Nathalie, though she knew well the consequences of this new misfortune, stood ready to meet them, resolute, though motionless and pale. The schoolmistress, her tall and thin frame drawn up to its full height, her arms folded across her breast, eyed them both with a moody glance, slowly nodding her head with vindictive triumph.

"Well," said she, sharply, "why don't you go on? why don't you continue your interesting conversation? I hope I don't prevent you."

She did not seem very likely to prevent Charles Marceau for, turning once more towards Nathalie, he coolly resumed from where he had left off.

"I should never have presumed to act as I have acted. This imprudence has injured me—justly, perhaps—in your good opinion; yet may I hope that you will forgive me?"

He looked up into her face, as if anxiously waiting for her reply. Mademoiselle Dantin, astounded at his coolness, and at the impertinent disregard with which he seemed to treat her presence, glared at him in speechless wrath. When she spoke at length, the whole torrent of her indignation was poured forth on Nathalie.

"I am delighted," said she, with a short exasperated laugh. "pleased beyond measure, to perceive that Mademoiselle Montolieu, that pattern of propriety, that model of virtuous indignation, entertains no great objection to a quiet evening rendezvous. By moonlight too;—how sentimental! They are fond of the moonlight in the south; here we think it cool."

Nathalie gave her a kindling look, but did not answer.

"Pray forgive me; I feel it was wrong, very wrong, indeed, to penetrate here, without your permission," said Charles Marceau, addressing Nathalie, but half glancing towards the schoolmistress.

"I hope," exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin, in a shrill tone, "I sincerely hope Mademoiselle Montolieu will attempt no useless or absurd justification. Mademoiselle Montolieu knows I am not to be duped. She knows the garden door was not only locked, but bolted on this side of the wall, and that by some individual on this side of the wall," she added, raising her voice, "the bolt must therefore have been withdrawn. I consider this as clear a proposition as any in the 'Grammaire Logique,' or any legal case I ever heard of."

"Madame," said Charles Marceau, turning towards her with something like hauteur," I pledge you my word that Mademoiselle Montonlieu is free from all blame;—that I alone am guilty."

The schoolmistress shut her eyes, and turned up her nose, with a short, disdainful sniff; but she deigned him neither reply nor answering look. He resumed:

"I hope, therefore, that the innocence of Mademoiselle Montolieu——"

"Spare yourself the task of its justification, sir," coldly interrupted Nathalie. "I need none, if Mademoiselle Dantin has overheard all."

"I did," triumphantly answered the schoolmistress, nodding her head, as she spoke, "I heard every word. I hear every thing in this establishment, Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"Then surely you know I am not to blame," observed Nathalie, with some impatience.

"Oh, no! Of course not at all!" said Mademoiselle Dantin, gently inclining her head, and eyeing Nathalie, through her half-shut eyes.

"Do you mean to hint that this gentleman is here with my connivance?" exclaimed Nathalie, with that impetuosity which always gave so much advantage to her opponent.

"Oh, no!" replied Mademoiselle Dantin, "by no means. You admit him! Impossible! It was I let him in, certainly."

Indignation and contempt struggled for mastery in Nathalie's expressive countenance. Her head drooped; she raised her hand to her forehead. When she spoke, her tone was altered and low.

"May heaven forgive you; you are more unjust,—aye, and far more cruel, than I thought you."

This speech did not tend to pacify the schoolmistress, who, to do her justice, thought the young girl guilty; perhaps because she wished to think her so; and though she had witnessed the meeting at a distance, had only overheard the observation in which Charles Marceau so unluckily introduced her name. She now loftily observed:

"You need not give yourself such airs of injured innocence; a pure-minded woman, who regarded either her health or her reputation, would never have stayed out in the open air until this hour."

"I think, madame," interposed Charles Marceau, "that I already explained——"

"Be so kind as to understand that the month's notice I gave you this evening is rescinded," continued Mademoiselle Dantin, totally disregarding the young man's attempted explanation. "After your disgraceful conduct, you cannot remain another night under the shelter of this uncontaminated roof."

"Madame," impatiently observed Charles Marceau, "have I not pledged you my word of honor that I alone am to blame—that this lady is wholly innocent?"

He spoke politely still, but with the authoritative surprise of a superior addressing a person of inferior rank. The schoolmistress eyed him from head to foot, then raised her look again until it met his.

"Sir," said she, at length, "I forgive your presumption, on account of your extreme youth; but you will please to remember I am mistress of these premises. Be so kind as to quit them instantly."

Without heeding her, the young man turned towards Nathalie.

"Mademoiselle," said he, in a submissive tone, which contrasted with the superciliousness he had displayed towards the schoolmistress, "words could not express the penitent sorrow I feel."

"I dare say not," cried Mademoiselle Dantin, with a short, hysterical laugh.

"Will my presence here be of the least use to you?" he earnestly continued. "Say but a word; and though this should expose me to the most bitter mortifications, I shall remain."

"Remain!" echoed the schoolmistress, with shrill indignation. "Monsieur will remain to protect mademoiselle! Well, I should like to see that. Remain!"

Not heeding her words more than the breeze which swept by him, Charles Marceau kept his eyes fixed on Nathalie, silently awaiting her reply. The young girl shrugged her shoulders, and tapped her little foot with evident impatience.

"You may go, sir," she said, in her hasty way. "Your presence, though quite able to produce mischief, is powerless for good."

"Oh! he may go, may he?" sharply ejaculated Mademoiselle Dantin. "How fortunate mademoiselle permits her knight to depart! There is no knowing, however, that I, though neither young nor pretty, might not have found means to effect the same marvel."

The young man heeded her not; he was looking at Nathalie, and his gaze had something of offended pride, anger, sadness, and reproach. But his glance fell at length; he bowed in silent submission, and folding his arms across his breast, slowly turned down the path.

The sound of the door, which closed behind him, revealed that he had left the place. Not satisfied with this evidence, Mademoiselle Dantin threw a keen look around her. On perceiving that he was really gone, she went and bolted the door carefully, then returned to the spot where Nathalie was still standing.

CHAPTER III.

The young girl did not change her attitude; she stood on the sward, erect and calm. The beech-tree threw its dark shadow behind her, but the clear moonlight fell on her face. She looked pale, though sedate; one hand supported her cheek, the other was rather nervously stripping a neighboring shrub of its leaves. Her heart, perchance, beat fast within her as she saw ruin and disgrace so near, but her brow was as fearless as her look was steady; her lips were firmly compressed as if she had resolved not to speak inconsiderately, though by no means to remain silent. She looked not unlike the mariner who sees the shore on which he must be wrecked ere long, but who beholds it with unquailing eye and heart unappalled by danger. As her glance met that of the schoolmistress its resolute meaning roused all her ire; she eyed her for awhile with sour sternness.

"You have heard me," she said at length.

"What have I heard?"

"That you must leave to-night."

"Why so?"

Different as their voices were, they both spoke in the same interjectional and rapid tone, exchanging looks that boded not peace.

"Why so?" again asked Nathalie, and she drew herself up haughtily, as if to repel with all her might the expected accusation and insult.

"Because, the schoolmistress steadily replied, "we are a calm phlegmatic race, and decidedly object to moonlight walks and meetings; because this is Normandy, not Provence, where such things are, I suppose, a matter of course."

Whenever Mademoiselle Dantin wished to rouse the young girl, she taunted her with her mother's birth. The brow of Nathalie flushed directly.

"You are right, madame," she quickly answered; "no, we are not in Provence; for there men have chivalrous honor and women warm, generous hearts, unknown to this land of lawyers, lawsuits, and narrow feeling."

"Oh! you may give me your killing looks," said Mademoiselle Dantin, shaking her head, "I am not afraid, though I have heard that your Provençal and Basque girls regularly wear a stiletto, instead of a busk to their stays, like those shocking Spanish women."

"Madame," replied Nathalie, shrugging her shoulders, after the French fashion, with disdainful impatience, "we are wandering from the point."

"The point," sharply said the schoolmistress, "is that you must leave this very night."

"I again ask why?" inquired Nathalie, eyeing her steadily.

"Because your behavior has been improper, unwomanly, immodest."

Nathalie's lips quivered, her color rose and died away, until it settled in a bright burning spot on either cheek. Shame, indignant anger, proud resentment of wrong were in her bearing and her look. Dignity vainly whispered to turn away with silent scorn; Nathalie was too unsophisticated to yield to its promptings; if ever she was or seemed dignified, it was because her mood led her to be so; but now she recked not of effect; insult had stung and roused her, as only insult can sting and rouse; passion was strong and would speak.

"I am not unwomanly or immodest," she passionately cried, her dark eyes flashing through tears, her voice broken by ill-repressed sobs; "I am not, but you are a very bad and cruel woman. To dismiss me is nothing, but to ruin my reputation and fair name is abominable. I did not let that young man in; I did not know he was coming; you must, you do know that."

The most evil are not all pitiless, and Mademoiselle Dantin, who was not a cruel, but an inflexible formalist, perhaps began to suspect that she had wrongly accused the young girl; perhaps her threat of instant dismissal had only been held out to give rise to an appeal for mercy; it may even be that some vague feeling of compassion induced her to relent. Whatever was the reason, she at least now said something about permitting her to spend the night in the house; she even hinted that, provided a proper submission were made to her offended majesty, she might be induced not to speak of the meeting she had detected. But Nathalie was in no placable mood; she resented this seeming concession as another implied insult but to be repelled with haughty disdain.

"Never!" she exclaimed, with true southern energy; "submit when I am innocent,—when I have done no wrong. Never! As for spending the night in this house, after the words you have uttered, I will not. In my country," she added, emphatically, "we are either at peace or at enmity. Now I tell you that I am not at peace with you, that I will not sleep beneath your roof."

"She is positively getting blue with anger," cried Mademoiselle Dantin, with a bewildered look.

"I have borne with ill-temper," continued Nathalie, "with petty annoyances, not patiently—I am not patient—but without more than passing anger. I considered that your years—"

"My years!"

"Your early disappointments had naturally soured your temper."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, if by early disappointments you allude to my not being married——"

"I allude to nothing, but I say that when you attack my honor I will resent it with all my might; that when you turn against me the stiletto, called slander, I will not be your guest, eat your bread, touch your salt, or sleep beneath your roof. I shall spend this night at the inn, and be on my road to Paris or Provence to-morrow. Say of me all you can say; I do not, I will not fear you."

She abruptly turned away, and when Mademoiselle Dantin recovered from the stupor into which this daring speech had thrown her, Nathalie had almost reached the end of the garden.

"Good heavens! what a tongue!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, drawing in a long breath.

She slowly returned to the house which she re-entered by a side door, whilst Nathalie stopped for a while near the glass door of the parlor. The reaction of passion had come—she was weeping; but the weakness was brief; she shook her tears away, smiled to herself and entered the "salon," as it was called, where a solitary light still burned on the table. She was passing rapidly through the room, when an anxious voice exclaimed:

"Mademoiselle Nathalie, what mean those pearly drops?"

Nathalie turned quickly round and stopped on beholding the little Chevalier, whom she had not perceived. He briskly stepped forward and eyed with evident emotion her flushed face, on which indignant tears still glistened.

"I have been insulted, Chevalier," she said in her rapid way."

"Insulted by whom?" he asked, with a frown.

"By a certain neighbor of ours, who imagined, no doubt, I had been pleased with impertinent attentions, and by a certain lady of this house who chose to share this belief."

The Chevalier looked grave. He might in a lady's defence call out a gentleman, but he could not exactly call out another lady.

"This must be a mistake," he at length observed; "mistakes will occur even between amiable ladies, especially when there is southern vivacity on one side and northern prudence on the other. There must be an *éclaircissement*."

Nathalie shook her head.

"Chevalier," she said, calmly enough, for her anger was as brief as it was vehement; "I grant that Mademoiselle Dantin is mistaken; that if she has tormented me, I have provoked her; but no *éclaircissement* could now make me stay here. We agree like fire and water, with this difference that she cannot quench me. Faulty I may be, but she is not the one by whom I can be changed. She will do me justice in this matter later; I hope and think so; if not, let it be; my own conscience acquits me; I care little for verdict. I am going this very night—adieu."

The little dancing-master drew back with a step expressive of dismay.

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed; "going! No, allow me; my feelings will not admit it—it cannot be."

He seemed filled with so much consternation that Nathalie could not repress a smile. He appeared to hesitate; but at length decisively observed:—"Will Mademoiselle Montolieu allow me a question: that—that gentleman——?"

His look finished the sentence. She colored a little and said:—

"Well, Chevalier, what about that gentleman?"

The little dancing-master coughed: it was so delicate a subject, and he had such a deep, almost painful respect for female delicacy, of which Mademoiselle Dantin had contributed to give him the most refined idea.

"Did he venture on language, too—too—ardent?" he observed with a frown.

"Oh! no," quietly replied Nathalie, "it was much worse."

"Much worse!" echoed the Chevalier, and visions of a kiss stolen from the fair hand of the Provençal girl, rendered the modest little man mute and abashed with indignation.

"Yes, much worse," decisively replied Nathalie; "what do I care about the courtesy or reserve of manner, when the actions are bold and insulting? He has followed me, written to me, and finally contrived a meeting in the garden, all without any encouragement save what he derived from his own presumption."

She looked indignant as she spoke.

The Chevalier was no doubt devoted to the ladies, but still he was a man, and could, in matters of the heart, feel for his own sex; he could, as he expressed it with a sigh, "sympathize with the follies and delirium of youthful passion;" and, provided that profound respect due to every woman were not infringed, he could tolerate almost any extravagance of conduct. It was, he contended, one of the rights and privileges of the fair sex, to make men act extravagantly; and the greater the folly the deeper the love. He now charitably endeavored to convince Nathalie of this truth. No doubt her admirer had been much to blame, but it was all the fault of his bewildering passion; he had endeavored to make that passion known by looks, writing and speech. "And as for his getting in by the door," feelingly added the dancing-master, "is it not much better than scrambling over the wall, as so many, unable to control their feelings, would have done in his place? a proceeding certainly more offensive to a lady's delicacy than that which he adopted."

Nathalie heard him with a patient smile. She liked the gentle Chevalier with his old-fashioned courtesy of bygone times, with his reverence for love, passion and women. Mademoiselle Dantin invariably drew forth the least amiable points in her character, but the Chevalier had the power to soften her down to girlish gentleness and grace. She quietly clasped her hand upon his arm, and looking down into his face, said softly:—

"You do not think me prudish, do you?"

"No, no," he warmly replied; "it is the beautiful, the sensitive delicacy of woman."

"No, it is not that," said the young girl, smiling and drawing up her slender figure, "it is pride;" and there was pride in her dark eye, curling lip, and erect bearing.

"But surely not a pride that forbids you to pity the unhappy passions you have inspired?" urged the tender-hearted Chevalier.

"What passion? He has seen me a few times, never so much as spoken to me before to-night; what passion can he feel?"

The Chevalier, too delicate to speak more openly, shook his head and sighed in the direction of the looking-glass over the mantle-shelf. Nathalie looked at first unconscious of his meaning, but as she saw her own image reflected back in the shadowy depths of the mirror, she blushed, and smiled at the compliment.

"Well, I suppose he finds me pretty," she said, resolutely conquering a little hesitation at speaking so frankly; "but how can I esteem the man who likes me for my face, without so much as knowing my heart, mind, or temper? You would not act or feel thus."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," seriously replied the Chevalier, laying his hand upon his heart, and looking down as he spoke, "must appeal to some less sensitive judge. I cannot, alas! but confess the power of beauty. I may also venture to hint to her that there are mysteries as yet unrevealed to her heart; that love conveys, in the slightest glimpse, an accurate knowledge of the beloved object; and that a particular friend of mine once received from the sight of a foot an impression never to be erased."

"A foot!" exclaimed Nathalie, laughing merrily, "why how can this be?"

But the Chevalier remained quite grave, and assured her that in a man of delicate feelings and sensitive heart such a passion was perfectly natural. As to the particular process by which the first impression ripened into love, he bashfully declared that speech was powerless to describe it, and, as Nathalie laughingly insisted, he quietly begged to change the subject. The young girl perceiving that his modesty was getting alarmed, immediately became serious; he resumed their previous conversation by saying:

"Let me also observe, in favor of the unhappy young man —I call every man unhappy who suffers from a lady's displeasure—that his uncle, Monsieur de Sainville, is generally considered a man of singular coldness and pride; a man whose haughty will——"

Nathalie interrupted him, and said briefly:

"The man, sir, who dares not confess such feelings openly, is not worthy of having them returned. This Monsieur Marceau sought, for his own sake, a concealment which has seriously injured me. He dared not have acted so with a great lady; but I was poor and obscure—therefore he ventured. There might have been something like courage in his conduct had I the stern father, uncle, or guardian, of a heroine of romance to brave; but I had not, and therefore is his action paltry. I am alone, undefended, and he showed me that he knew it."

"No, not alone, not undefended, whilst Theodore de Méranville-Louville has the breath of life and the heart and arm of a man," fervently exclaimed the gallant little dancing-master, half kneeling at her feet in a transport of chivalrous ardor.

In her surprise Nathalie stepped back. She knew not the powerful impression her words had produced on the gentle and generous nature of the Chevalier. He beheld her, a young and lovely girl, in need of protection, and saw nothing better than to offer himself with prompt zeal for the defence of her person and honor. It was not the little man's fault if he came in this world ages after chivalry had gone out of fashion; still less his fault, if nature and fortune, whilst giving him the soul and illusive name, had denied him the shape and profession of knight. Nathalie promptly understood him; she was both amused and touched, and smiled down on the dancing-master through gathering tears.

"Rise, Sir Chevalier," she said, holding out her hand to him, and entering with southern mirth and vivacity into the spirit of the tone he assumed; "if ever I need defender or knight, I will have none save you."

Enraptured at this promise, the Chevalier kissed the tips of her fingers, and rose with the triumphant mien of a knight received into the favor of a fair lady, whilst with a smile that gradually became more arch, she continued:

"But I need not remind a man of your worldly tact, that the time is gone when ladies sought or accepted the vindication of their honor from the strong arm of man."

"And why should it be gone?" he somewhat jealously exclaimed; "why should not the strong arm of man, as you so justly observe, be stretched forth to protect innocence and beauty?"

"Because the world is a slanderous world," replied Nathalie with a serious face, but mirth and mischief in her eyes; "because it would be sure to say that nothing save the most violent passion could impel the Chevalier to take, so energetically, the defence of Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"Well, then," he exclaimed, with much *entraînement* "since you have perceived my folly, I confess it; yes, I am your slave." He spoke in a very exited tone, and stood with folded arms before her.

At first Nathalie remained stunned.

"Is the poor little man actually in love with me?" she thought, with dismay; but her fears vanished when she remembered how eloquently he had pleaded the cause of Charles Marceau. The truth was, that the too sensitive Chevalier was in love with every woman he knew, from Mademoiselle Dantin down to Marianne, and consequently with Nathalie, as well as the rest; her unprotected and painful position—his half-accepted offer of becoming her knight had fired his brain, and, for the moment, he certainly felt a most violent passion, which he was not far from thinking returned. At the same time, he was somewhat dismayed at the boldness of his avowal. Nathalie was too much amused to look angry, and too kind-hearted to laugh; she feigned deafness, and said, quietly:

"I need not tell you how injurious to a lady's reputation any such *éclat* would be; therefore, my good knight, I, your liege lady, lay on you my sovereign commands not to hurt or molest, in any manner whatsoever, the individual named Charles Marceau."

"May I not speak to his uncle?" asked the Chevalier, a little crest-fallen, for he was not quite the dupe of Nathalie's deafness.

"By no means; the uncle has the name of a most disagreeable, haughty man—I care no more for him than I do for his nephew."

"But, Mademoiselle, something must be done,—what will you do?"

"Leave this house to-night," was the calm reply.

"That only makes the matter worse;—I must speak to Mademoiselle Dantin."

"And what can you say to her that she does not know? If, finding me alone in the garden with a young man, she chooses to believe I brought him there, who shall prevent her?"

"I certainly cannot prevent her," replied the dancing-master, with something like dignity, but there is such a thing as protesting against an injustice. If Mademoiselle Dantin will be unjust to a young and unprotected lady, I shall and must break with her."

He spoke very decisively. Nathalie looked at him with some emotion.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said she, gently, "you were ill last year." The Chevalier looked very rueful. "You have not many friends in Sainville," she continued; "and then I believe you had but one."

"Yes," he replied, thoughtfully, rubbing his aquiline nose, "heaven forbid I should ever forget or deny a lady's favors. Mademoiselle Dantin certainly showed herself a kind lady; the medicines she sent me were rather bitter, but wonderfully fine, I have no doubt: she also sent me some very excellent confitures and jellies when I was getting better—these were sweet."

"My friend," kindly said Nathalie, "you must not break with a woman who has done this, who would do it again, and who, if she has a gentle feeling in her breast, has it for you. Besides, it would be useless—nothing shall make me stay here; I have been insulted—I must go: be quite easy about me, God is good to all, and kind to the young."

The little Chevalier slapped his forehead distractedly, and paced the room with hasty steps and agitated air. He felt grateful for both medicines and jellies; and the "gentle feeling" of which Nathalie spoke, moved him strangely. He could not, with any delicacy, inquire into the exact nature of Mademoiselle Dantin's weakness, and, indeed, felt rather alarmed at the prospect of ascertaining how far it had gone. But touched and grateful as he felt, it was impossible to forget that he was the sworn knight of another lady now in sore distress. For a moment his fertile and excited imagination represented him as standing between two fair dames,—one certainly lovely, and the other intellectual—is not intellect beauty?—and not knowing on which side to turn. But at length he took a truer and calmer view of the subject, smoothed his wig, composed himself, and magnanimously resolved to abide where gratitude cast her chains around him.

Nathalie smiled when he announced his resolve with a rueful sigh; she bade him a cheerful adieu, and gayly assured him he was none the less her knight. The dancing-master took her hands within his own—an unwonted freedom—and looked at her silently.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he said at length, in a moved tone, "you are young, pretty, and very charming, but you have something far better than all that—a good, kind heart. Happy the man who is to have you, and may God bless him and you!"

Tears stood in his eyes, and in Nathalie's too, as they parted. She went up to her room with a light, cheerful heart. Nothing had occurred to change her position; but her temper had led her to yield to every impression of the moment, and her present impressions were light and pleasant. Resting her curved chin in the palm of her hand, she paced the room up and down in meditative mood. A smile was on her lips, and the look of her dark eyes was bright and hopeful.

"I am glad I am going," she thought, "truly glad. This perverse woman would positively end by making me enjoy a quarrel. I have enjoyed it—I know I have," she added, a little ruefully; "but I dare say all this is for the best: I could scarcely have left her otherwise, but now I must go, of course; and where shall I go, I wonder?"

She stopped short, and looked grave and disturbed. She was a stranger in Sainville; her only friend was her sister, and she was now at Rouen, with the old aunt under whose protection she resided. The town inn seemed the only place open to the young girl. It was a quiet, decent house, where few travellers ever came, yet the thought of going there was extremely disagreeable to Nathalie; she now regretted not having agreed to spend the night in the school. But this was a trifling consideration in comparison to another which offered itself to her attention under the following startling form: "Mademoiselle Dantin will say I contrived a meeting with that young man in the garden. I did not: but will the world believe her or me?" She endeavored to chase the thought away, but it would return, and with it the growing conviction that her own version of the story would not be that most favorably received. Disgrace, whether it be merited or not, is hard to bear, in youth especially. Nathalie was one of those impatient spirits who resent injustice in word and feeling. She had never submitted to Mademoiselle Dantin's tyranny; she now felt indignant and amazed that a chain of circumstances, over which she seemingly had no power, should have produced results so galling to her pride and so fatal to her welfare. She was young and handsome, therefore she was to be suspected; poor, therefore unfriended and alone; innocent, but not the less disgraced.

"Is this possible?" she asked of herself with incredulous surprise. She thought of Charles, but with increased bitterness and indignation, and as the cause of all her woe. Why had he persecuted her with attentions so fatal, which had tarnished her name, and cast on it a stain she would find it so hard to efface? She found an insult not only in the boldness of his actions, but also in the coolness and composure which characterized them. She recalled with irritation every particular of this interview. "He is not handsome," she ejaculated inwardly; "I looked at him well, and it was not so dark but what I could see: I like neither his face nor his look; one is too old in feeling, and the other too keen and watchful in expression. His whole conduct was heartless and cruel; he shall find himself mistaken if he imagines it has placed me in his power!"

The mere idea roused her; she also remembered it was time to act—not merely to think of her departure, but to prepare for it. Ere long her drawers were emptied, and their contents transferred to her trunk. She was cording it up, when a low, timid knock was heard at the door. Nathalie knew it was Marianne, the servant. She bade her enter, and, merely glancing round, resumed her task.

The girl obeyed, closed the door with nervous haste, then remained standing near it without speaking. She had a good-natured face, fresh and full; but her eyes, of a pale blue, had a startled and bewildered look, as if she were in a state of constant alarm.

"Well, Marianne; what is it?" asked Nathalie, in her quick, cheerful way, rising as she spoke to face the girl.

But Marianne, on perceiving the corded trunk, uttered a faint scream. Nathalie gave her a look of surprise.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Marianne, still short of breath, "I have done it!—You are going!—I have done it!"

"You, Marianne!" quickly said Nathalie, looking very vexed. "Do you mean to say you let that young man in?"

Marianne hung down her head and wrung her hands.

"Answer me," imperatively said Nathalie; "did you do it or not?"

"I thought there was no harm," said Marianne, feebly.

"No harm!"

"I mean that you would not be angry."

This did not mend the matter.

"And pray what made you think so?" dryly asked Nathalie.

"I thought——I am sure I do not know—but he was so handsome."

"He is not," was the sharp reply; "but he is very insolent, Marianne."

"Oh, is he?" said Marianne, looking rather bewildered. "I am very sorry, but I thought that, being so rich and handsome——as I imagined," she added, correcting herself, and so fond of you too"—Nathalie's lip curled disdainfully—"I fancied——I know I ought not to have done it; but Mademoiselle Dantin always says I am so wicked, and I suppose I am," she added, disconsolately.

Nathalie's resentment was as readily appeased as it was easy to awaken. She knew Marianne was a poor weak and nervous creature, whose little original spirit had long been broken by the redoubtable Mademoiselle Mantin. She believed, moreover, that she was attached to her, and had probably thought to serve her by her indiscreet conduct. She now sought to console her by assuring her of her forgiveness; but on hearing this, Marianne began to sob and moan very drearily, calling all the saints of heaven to witness that she had meant no harm.

"Very well," rather abruptly said Nathalie, who was more kind-hearted than patient; "come, Marianne, here is the *fichu* I have cut out for you; you have nothing to do but to hem it."

But as this recalled to Marianne the many similar kindnesses she had received from the young girl, it only added to her grief. Nathalie perceiving that she was getting hysterical, made her sit down, and laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, kindly looked into her face, whilst she said with some gravity:

"You have cried enough, and tears are of no earthly use. You did wrong, meaning well; a common mistake. I have forgiven you, let us hear no more about it; indeed, the sooner you leave this room the better. On reflection, I think it is quite useless your mistress should know what has passed. She would not exonerate me, but say we were accomplices; only Marianne, if another teacher should come in my place, do not let young men get into the garden. And now, what was it you came up here to tell me?"

"Holy Virgin!" cried Marianne, much startled, "I quite forget it! The sight of that trunk—"

"What was it?"

"A message from Mademoiselle Dantin."

"She might have spared herself that trouble," quickly exclaimed Nathalie, coloring very much, as she spoke; "I have no wish to stay. I am quite ready to go; Marianne, you may tell her so," she added, putting on her shawl and tying her bonnet-strings.

"*Oh! mon Dieu*, Mademoiselle," said Marianne, "it was not that at all,—but you are so quick! just like a milksoup,—up directly."

"Well, what was it then?"

"Why I believe it is a strange lady below who wishes to speak to you."

"A lady!" said Nathalie, looking up with much surprise; "and who is she, Marianne?"

Marianne did not know. The lady's face was turned from her when she answered her mistress's ring, and it was not she who had let her in. Nathalie felt puzzled to imagine who the stranger might be, for she was acquainted with no one in Sainville; but without losing much time in conjecturing or accepting Marianne's offer of knowing from the other servant, she resolved to go down and learn.

She paused for a moment on reaching the door of the parlor; it stood ajar, and a ray of light glided from the opening into the dark corridor. She had thought to hear the stranger's voice, and thus learn who she was, but if the room had been vacant it could not have been more silent. With an indefinite feeling between hope and uneasiness, Nathalie pushed the door open and entered.

Mademoiselle Dantin was seated. as when we first saw her, before the table which had been Nathalie's bar of judgment. She looked discomposed: and an angry spot sat on either of her sallow cheeks, as she fanned herself indignantly with a coarse colored pocket-handkerchief. At a little distance from her, with her back to the door, stood a lady, who quickly turned round on hearing Nathalie enter.

She was tall, erect, and very richly attired; she looked between forty and fifty; she might have appeared, and she perhaps was, younger, but for the careworn expression of her countenance. Her features were more regular than pleasing; the brow was too low, and the upper lip had a haughty curl, yet the whole face was far from repulsive; many would have pronounced it handsome.

Nathalie looked at her and vaguely felt that she had seen her before, but where or how, she could not remember.

"The young lady, I presume," said the stranger, giving Nathalie a keen look, and addressing Mademoiselle Dantin, in a rich harmonious voice that seemed familiar to the young girl's ear. The schoolmistress gave a short disdainful nod as the lady turned once more towards Nathalie and observed, with an inclination of the head, between pride and courtesy:

"I am come, Mademoiselle Montolieu, to express my great regret for the indiscretion of which my son rendered himself guilty towards you this evening.—I regret it exceedingly," she added, slightly drawing herself up.

Nathalie bowed silently. She now recognized the speaker as their neighbor Madame Marceau. The lady continued:

"I am really distressed that a son of our house—that my son—should have acted so. I understand too there is a servant in the case;—it is positively shocking."

She raised a richly-chased vinaigrette to her nose, as if to purify the very idea.

"Shocking!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin, irefully; "it is more, madame, I"—drawing herself up—"I call it abominable! To bribe my servant;—but I shall teach the bold creature her place yet," she added, rising to give the bell-rope a violent pull.

"Not now, madame,—not now," said Madame Marceau waving her right hand with a haughty grace, that did not misbecome her, whilst her left maintained the vinaigrette in its position;—"not now, I pray. I have no doubt, from what my son has told me, the girl is guilty; I should certainly dismiss her. At the same time, I am sure your ready tact will suggest to you the impropriety of any such explanation at present. You may go," she added, directing a stately nod towards Marianne, who had appeared at the door with her usual bewildered air; "your mistress does not want you yet. Go, my good girl,—go."

Mademoiselle Dantin was no submissive person, yet somehow or other she now resumed her seat, and allowed Marianne to depart in silence. Madame Marceau bore her down completely. It was not the lady's wealth or station effected this wonder, for the schoolmistress, to do her justice, never stooped save where there was some advantage to be derived, and in the present case there was none; but though she could not exactly understand why, she now felt entirely thrown into the shade. Madame Marceau's stately person and grand ways, her figure, full yet graceful—her dress of rich silk and ample folds,—her Indian shawl, negligently draped around her, as if it were a thing of no price,—ay, even her bonnet, with the waving plums that rose and fell with every motion of the wearer's head, failed not in their effect, and hushed the wrath of the schoolmistress. Being, however, a woman of very great spirit, she soon rallied, and was preparing for an outbreak of which the exordium would have been relative to the propriety of some people giving orders to their own servants, and other people not going to be trodden upon, when Madame Marceau, perceiving her intention, interfered.

"By-and-by, my good Mademoiselle Dantin," said she, with a patronizing smile, "by-and-by; allow me first to explain the case to this young lady. I am distressed, extremely so indeed," she continued, addressing her discourse to Nathalie; "I positively am, at all that has happened. I have been explaining the whole matter to Mademoiselle Dantin, who now understands her mistake,"—the schoolmistress was preparing for an indignant denial, but was not permitted to open her lips,—"by-and-by, when I have explained every thing to Mademoiselle Montolieu. At the same time," resumed Madame Marceau, again addressing Nathalie, "I have no difficulty in understanding that for many reasons you may object to remain even one day longer beneath her roof. Will you accept of the hospitality which, when I had confided to him what my son had confided to me, my brother begged of me to offer you? But pray," she added, very graciously, "receive this proposal in the same spirit in which it is made,—as a favor to be conferred upon us. We really shall not be easy unless you afford us this opportunity of repairing my son's deplorable indiscretion. Nathalie made no reply; she evidently hesitated. Madame Marceau gave an anxious look. "I hope," said she, somewhat uneasily, "the offer is not displeasing. I am sure I should be quite grieved——What is it, madame?"

The latter words came out very sharply, and were addressed to Mademoiselle Dantin, who, on hearing Madame Marceau's altered tone and language, had thought proper to recline back in her chair, close her eyes, and give utterance to a disdainful "Bah!"

"What is it, madame?" again asked Madame Marceau, drawing up her fine figure, and wrapping herself with extreme majesty.

"Nothing, madame," shortly replied the schoolmistress.

Madame Marceau eyed her very slowly, then turned once more towards Nathalie, evidently waiting for her reply.

The young girl's resolve was already taken. She did not think that between the inn or the château of Sainville there was much cause to hesitate; she could, moreover, detect a great difference in the tone with which Madame Marceau addressed her, from that in which she spoke to Mademoiselle Dantin; the distinction gratified her wounded pride. But composed as she endeavored to seem, there was a feeling she could not help betraying, and this feeling was surprise. She knew that the step Madame Marceau now took was the very last any of the *bourgeoise* ladies of Sainville would have adopted in similar circumstances. Madame Marceau, who was looking at her very attentively, smiled with a sort of quiet triumph, that seemed to say: "Yes, my dear child, it is so; no little *parvenue* would act thus; but I am a great lady of that old noblesse which has courtesy and chivalry of feeling still. Our titles are nothing; our wealth is gone, but that remains to distinguish us for ever from those of plebeian blood and race."

It was thus at least that Nathalie rapidly interpreted the meaning of the dark and handsome, though haughty face, on which she now gazed; but she subdued her momentary surprise and replied, with a gravity and composure unusual to her:

"Madame, I sincerely thank you for your offer. I will not say that I accept it, because the circumstances you allude to with so much regret leave me no other choice; my motives are, I trust, of a higher order. The insinuations which Mademoiselle Dantin has thrown out against me would, I confess it, seem to be justified by my abrupt departure from her establishment, where, nevertheless, I have no wish to remain—no, not one hour longer," she added, giving the schoolmistress a reproachful glance; "but if I leave her house for yours," she continued, again addressing Madame Marceau, "her protection for your protection, I believe that my bitterest enemies, if I have indeed any, must needs be silent; these, and these only, are my motives."

She spoke with quiet pride, almost coldly, for she was jealous of not compromising her dignity.

"Whatever they may be," very graciously replied Madame Marceau, "I am too happy at the result, not to think them excellent; and I feel sure Mademoiselle Dantin shares my gratification at so agreeable a conclusion of an unpleasant matter."

Madame!" replied the schoolmistress, darting an angry look towards her, and speaking in a tone that quivered with anger

"I might say much, but will confine myself to one remark. for no consideration would I suffer under my roof, as you seem inclined to suffer under yours, such things——"

"What things?" asked Madame Marceau.

"Such things as a modest woman does not care to mention."

Madame Marceau carried her vinaigrette to her nose with extreme dignity.

"Upon my word, Mademoiselle Dantin," said she, quietly, "you astonish me. What ideas! for an instructress of youth too; you do astonish me. I believe you are ready, Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, addressing Nathalie. "Will you be kind enough to take my arm? A servant shall come round for your trunks this evening."

Nathalie silently obeyed, but felt somewhat mortified on recollecting that she was leaving only one trunk behind her. They had reached the door, when Madame Marceau turned round, and coldly observed:

"Good evening, Mademoiselle Dantin. I think it right to observe to you, that Mademoiselle Montolieu being now under my protection, I shall consider any remark derogatory to her as a personal insult to me."

She drew herself up, and turned away. Nathalie followed her example. but not without first casting a look over the gloomy room, with the globes, the maps, the cheerless hearth, the comfortless furniture, the ungracious and withered figure of the schoolmistress, as she sat rigidly in her chair, and feeling, with a sense of inexpressible relief, that she was leaving them all for ever.

A new page in the history of her life was indeed turned over.

CHAPTER IV.

The château of Sainville stood on the brow of an eminence which overlooked the quiet town of Sainville, gathered up below within the shallow compass of a little Norman valley.

A broad road, shaded by trees on either side, wound its way up the steep ascent, passed before the narrow door of the school-house and the iron gateway of the mansion, then abruptly descended the other side of the eminence, and extended far away into the open country, among yellow stubble-fields and green meadows, with here and there a solitary dwelling. Of this prospect, which looked gay and pastoral in the sunshine, nothing was visible on the present evening; the moon was obscured by light clouds that slowly passed over her disk, following one another along the gloomy sky, like ships sailing in the same track, until they vanished in the distant depths of heaven; a chill breeze had risen, and its vague murmurs blended with the rustling sound of the withered leaves which it swept away from the lonely road.

On leaving the school-house, the two ladies turned away from the lingering household lights which still burned in the vale at their feet, and walked along in silence until they reached an avenue of old and majestic elms on their left. At the end of that avenue rose the old château. The iron gate stood open; they entered, walked to the end and ascended a flight of steps that led to the porch. Their approach seemed to have been witnessed and expected, for the door noiselessly opened to admit them. Nathalie caught a glimpse of a tall servant in black, standing in a respectful attitude in the spacious and lighted hall, a wide and majestic flight of marble steps with railings of rich iron filagree extended beyond. They entered.

"Where is my son?" asked Madame Marceau.

"Monsieur Charles left very shortly after madame."

"Has she asked this that I may know he is gone?" quickly thought Nathalie. She glanced around; the air of grandeur which pervaded all she saw, the obsequious tone and downcast eyes of the servant, the stately dignity of Madame Marceau as she crossed the hall with her haughty mien and her rustling robe, showed her how different was the atmosphere she was entering from that of the world she had left. She was not awed, but could scarcely help feeling impressed. They ascended the staircase in silence. Madame Marceau paused on reaching the first floor landing. In a recess stood the dark bronze statue of a female slave bearing a pale, transparent lamp, which shed around a soft and subdued light. The elder lady turned towards her companion, and laying her hand on the gilt door-handle of a wide folding-door, she observed, in her rich, full voice, looking down at Nathalie as she spoke, "I must beg leave to introduce you to my aunt the Canoness; she is very old, a little infirm, and rather deaf. I feel confident she will be charmed to know you. Pray do not feel uneasy; she is a very simple person—extremely so. Perhaps we shall also see my brother, Monsieur de Sainville; but pray be quite at your ease."

She spoke so graciously that Nathalie felt vexed at the trepidation which drew forth so much condescension. Daring as she was when roused by injustice, the young girl was nevertheless shy with strangers; she now felt doubly so. What would the old Canoness, probably a rigid old devotee, think of her? How could Monsieur de Sainville, that grave and, if report spoke truly, morose man, consider the obscure girl who had attracted his nephew's attention? Yet with this feeling of uneasiness there blended a strong share of curiosity to obtain a nearer view of one who, whether in good or ill, had excited much attention since his return to Sainville.

Madame Marceau, who was eyeing Nathalie keenly, appeared far from annoyed at what she could read of those feelings in the young girl's veiled countenance. Complacently patting the hand which rested on her arm, she once more exhorted her to banish all uneasiness, and opening the door, she led the way into a large, old-fashioned drawing-room, with a lofty ceiling and deep windows, now screened by thick crimson curtains that fell to the ground. Several large mirrors gave additional vastness to the apartment, and reflected in their shadowy depths the light of a lamp suspended from the ceiling. In contrast to its soft, pale rays, was the ardent glow of the wood-fire that burned on the hearth, and shone back with a deeper and more burning red from the polished surface of the surrounding furniture. The walls were hung with pictures in heavy gilt frames; they were chiefly old family portraits, and had all the mellow tones of age. There was warmth and richness in the coloring of the whole room.

Nathalie at first shrank behind Madame Marceau and scarcely raised her eyes from the floor. She felt as if Monsieur de Sainville's keen look, of which she had often heard, were fastened upon her; when she at length looked up, blushing and slightly confused, she perceived at the further end of the apartment a very diminutive old lady, seated in a deep arm-chair, by the fire-side, and knitting with extreme rapidity. She did not pause in her occupation or take any notice of their entrance. With mingled relief and disappointment, Nathalie perceived that Monsieur de Sainville was not there. Madame Marceau, still keeping the young girl's arm within her own, and nodding in her encouraging manner, led her along the room at a slow and stately pace. As they advanced towards the fire-place, the large mirror over it reflected her fine figure, rich attire, and waving plumes; on the whole she looked very majestic. They paused on reaching the old lady's arm-chair, and gently touching the arm of her relative, Madame Marceau said in a key higher than her usual tones:

"Aunt,—dear Aunt Radegonde."

The Canoness slowly raised her head. Nathalie was captivated at once by the look of her mild blue eyes, still deep in color, and by the kind and benignant smile which played on her features as she beheld them. A devotee she might be, but she certainly did not seem a rigid one. Her hair, of a silvery white, was parted and smoothed beneath a close lace cap; she wore a dress of black silk brocade, very full and antique in fashion, but fitting her extremely well. On her bosom glittered a large gold cross, the sign of the gay and worldly order to which she belonged. She was evidently very old, but her neat and slender little figure had not suffered from years, or lost the nicety of its proportions; she sat and knitted in a very erect fashion. Nathalie thought she had never beheld a being who realized so completely her childish beau ideal of the benevolent fairy.

"I have brought you Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Madame Marceau, again addressing her aunt.

"I am very glad to see her," cheerfully replied the Canoness; "the poor child looks hot; well, it is perhaps early to have a fire; for my part I think the heat a good thing at all times; besides, I am subject to rheumatism, and this old drawing-room is so cold and chill of an evening. Pray take off your bonnet and shawl, my dear, and sit here by me."

There was in her manner a kindness free from Madame Marceau's patronizing courtesy as she now took Nathalie's hand, and with a smile made her sit down on a low luxurious seat by her side, eyeing her all the time with evident and *naïve* curiosity. Not satisfied with the imperfect glimpse which she thus obtained, she rose, and declaring that "the poor child was still too warm," she very decisively divested Nathalie of both bonnet and shawl, and remained silent and wondering before her. Nathalie was always pretty, but now the warm fire-light gave so deep a bloom to her cheek, to her eyes a light so soft, and to the clear outlines of her whole countenance so vivid and dazzling a brightness, heightened by her dark hair and sombre attire, that Aunt Radegonde could not but look at her with a mute surprise, which soon subsided into the smiling complacency the sight of youth and beauty inspires in those whom old age has mellowed, not soured. The language of her admiring glance was one beauty learns to read early, and a smile, half-shy, half-pleased, trembled on Nathalie's parted lips. The Canoness turned towards her niece, and, raising herself on tiptoe to reach her ear, she mysteriously whispered, with a shrewd nod in the direction of Nathalie:

"She is very pretty."

The young girl colored deeply and stooped as if to arrange her hair. Madame Marceau did not reply. She too looked at Nathalie with a surprise verging on admiration, but far from implying pleasure.

"I cannot blame poor Charles so much," continued the Canoness, in the same audible key which she mistook for the lowest whisper.

"Hush, aunt," said her niece, with imperious tone and darkening brow.

"We shall see whether our critical Armand will find fault with that face," added the indiscreet Canoness, with visible triumph.

Nathalie looked very much disconcerted. Armand was the christian name of Monsieur de Sainville. Madame Marceau pressed the arm of her aunt, and slightly apologized to the young girl, reminding her that her relative was, as she had informed her, a little deaf. She spoke with a significant look, and in a loud key.

"Deaf!" echoed Aunt Radegonde, much nettled. "Indeed I hear as well as most people; every one is more or less deaf: the only difference is in the quantity. Then as to what I said, I do not think it was so offensive that you need have pinched my arm, Rosalie. In my time, young girls liked to be thought pretty, and when they were pretty, young men were very apt to find it out too."

With a haughty nod, that implied "take that," to her niece, the Canoness walked back to her arm-chair, stiffly sat down, and rapidly knitted away, erect and dignified. Madame Marceau's lip curled as she looked down at her aunt for a moment; but her glance soon reverted to Nathalie, whom she keenly eyed from head to foot, without seeming to notice that the young girl returned her scrutinizing look. The lady stood facing her, near the fire-place, bareheaded, but with the Indian shawl that seemed as a portion of her dignity, still negligently draped around her person. Nathalie was struck with the ro semblance her handsome features bore to those of her son; but the same sharpness of outline and careworn expression marred their beauty. The look which she now cast on the young girl was fixed and moody, but when their eyes suddenly chanced to meet, she smilded very blandly.

"Aunt," said she, addressing her relative in a most gracious tone; "would you believe that this terrible old schoolmistress would scarcely let me see mademoiselle!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, forgetting her resentment. She quickly looked round at Nathalie, suspended her knitting, cast her head up sideways, in an interrogative listening sort of fashion, probably rendered imperative and habitual by her infirmity and short stature, and thus displayed the profile of a little Gallic *nez retroussé*, strongly indicative of inquisitiveness.

"Mademoiselle Dantin was irritable this evening;" quietly said Nathalie, feeling a reply was expected.

"Is she often so?" promptly asked the Canoness.

"Yes, pretty often," answered Nathalie smiling.

"Then you did not like her?"

"We did not agree;—our tempers were different." She spoke coldly; she did not love Mademoiselle Dantin, but she scorned to attack her.

"Ah!" slowly said Aunt Radegonde, who seemed to expect more. "Indeed!" she ejaculated, after a pause; but as this produced nothing, she quietly resumed her knitting.

"There is much to try the temper of persons in Mademoiselle Dantin's dependent position," charitably observed Madame Marceau. "She is, I suppose, neither better nor worse than most individuals of her class. Mademoiselle Montolieu, let me hope that you will have some refreshment."

Without waiting for objection or reply, she rang the bell. Almost immediately a servant entered, bearing a tray covered with delicacies. Madame Marceau carelessly signed him to place it on a small table near Nathalie. As soon as he retired, she politely pressed her guest to take something; when the young girl complied, to please her, she retired to a low settee, where she reclined majestically, supported by a pile of cushions, not exactly looking at Nathalie, but keeping her within view. But inexperienced as she was, Nathalie had the finesse of a southern and a woman. She felt that she had been introduced into that stately drawing-room, with emblazoned ceiling, and antique furniture, gleaming in the red fire-light, in order to be dazzled by the sight of unaccustomed magnificence. She had been a little disconcerted at first; now she felt quite composed.

"How sorry I am," observed Madame Marceau, casting a gracious look towards her guest, "that my brother, Monsieur de Sainville, does not spend this evening with us. He would I am sure have been charmed to see Mademoiselle Montolieu. Besides," she thoughtfully added, "when one is so happy as to have a brother, and every one is not so fortunate——"

"Have you got a brother, my dear?" interrupted her aunt, addressing Nathalie with her interrogative air.

"No, madame; I have only a sister."

"Does she live in Sainville?" asked the Canoness.

"Generally she does: but now Rose is at Rouen, for a week."

"Rose! what a pretty name! May I ask to know yours, there is much meaning in names; mine is Radegonde, from Sainte Radegonde, one of our earliest queens. Yours is—Nathalie! Ah!" And the Canoness became suddenly meditative.

"Nathalie!" carelessly observed Madame Marceau, who had however been listening with evident attention; "Nathalie! Did we not know a lady of that name at Marseilles, aunt?"

"Marseilles!" echoed Aunt Radegonde, "why, are you from the south, my dear?" she suddenly asked, as if the idea had not occurred to her before.

"I am a Provençal."

"I might have known it, by your quick, piquant way of speaking, so unlike our long nasal Norman accent; you have got a touch of the southern tongue, and very pleasant it is too," she added, smiling.

"Nathalie Montolieu!" abstractedly observed her niece: "yes, the name is decidedly southern."

"Montolieu! is that your other name, my dear? why Rosalie, how can you call that a southern name? I am sure, now you mention it, that it is a Sainville name; have you forgotten the Docteur Montolieu, who attended on my poor Lucile, and who, when you became a widow, wished so much to marry you?"

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a rapid and indignant look, while Nathalie quietly observed.

"That Docteur Montolieu was my father; he left Sainville after the death of his first wife, and went to Arles, where he married my mother."

Madame Marceau looked thunderstruck at the unexpected revelation, which so suddenly lessened the distance between herself and the daughter of the man who had formerly aspired to the honor of her hand. She had been many years away from Sainville, and did not so much as know of the doctor's second marriage. Mademoiselle Dantin had dryly informed her, that Nathalie was a Provençal, and pretended to know no more; this fact, confirmed by the young girl's southern accent, had completely misled her. Curious, however, to know who her guest really was, she had, accordingly to her usual tactics, when there was a secret in the way, put her aunt on the track; the result had far surpassed her wishes and expectations. Indeed there was now something pitiable in her consternation; in the nervous tremor with which she used her vinaigrette, and in the hurried affectation of pleasantry with which she treated her aunt's assertion, and strove to check the torrent of her voluble astonishment at this coincidence.

"Yes, I remember Docteur Montolieu; a good honest man, as you say, aunt—very strange coincidence—extremely so Mademoiselle Montolieu, I can see you are oppressed with fatigue; allow me to show you to your room."

Nathalie rose, but the Canoness would kiss her very affectionately before she went, and holding her hand, ask her how long her father had been dead; tell her what a very clever man he was; how he had attended her during a long illness, and hint mysteriously that if Rosalie had only wished, she might now have been her—Nathalie's—mamma; to all of which her haughty niece was compelled to listen with powerless indignation, until at length, unable to bear more, she hurried the young girl out of the apartment. She smoothed her brow, and resumed all her composure, as the drawing-room door closed upon them, and drowned the sounds of Aunt Radegonde's voice.

Graciously requesting Nathalie to follow her, she led the way up another flight of the wide staircase. The shadowy height of the ceilings, the statues and objects of art which adorned every recess, and the breadth of the stairs, impressed Nathalie with a certain grandeur of design which belongs to old mansions. On reaching the second-floor landing, lit like the first, they turned into a long and narrow passage or gallery, as the lady called it, with doors on either side. These, as Madame Marceau informed the young girl, in an impressive tone,—these were the doors of the sleeping apartments of the château; they had been inhabited in turn by the whole of the family since the edifice was first erected.

"And this is your room, Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, opening the last door, and entering a small octagon room, hung with blue damask, somewhat faded, and lit by a crystal lamp suspended from the low ceiling. "We are now in one of the four turrets of the château," she continued, nodding and smiling at the young girl. Her look, tone, and bearing bespoke inward complacency.

"How fine the view must be!" cried Nathalie, charmed with her apartment.

"All the views are fine from the château of Sainville," replied the stately lady; "indeed, I may say, they are celebrated. My room is close to yours; I mention this, lest you should imagine yourself secluded like some châtelaine of old, in this 'blue room of the western tower,' which has received more than one real châtelaine. Indeed, I hope you are not afraid of spirits: it is said to be haunted."

Then followed a legend of two beautiful sisters, Constance and Adelaide de Sainville, who had successively tenanted this apartment, and both died there in the last century. Constance had fitted it up as her oratory, and retired to it daily for meditation and prayer; she died young, pure and happy. After her death, it became the sleeping apartment of Adelaide, a gay and voluptuous lady, who caused the walls, left bare by the ascetic Constance, to be hung with soft silken damask, and introduced the downy couch, the mirror and crystal lamp, preserving only the plain wooden *prie-dieu* as a token of her sister's presence. She, too, it seemed, had died young, but neither resigned nor happy. On the last day of her life she caused herself to be attired in all the gorgeous splendor of the old court costume, surveyed herself in the mirror, and with many sighs and tears, bade youth and beauty farewell. Her restless spirit was said to haunt the spot. Madame Marceau smilingly assured the young girl this was only an idle report. But though she spoke of the blue room of the western tower, and of the family legends, with seeming carelessness, her studied fluency of speech, as she recalled those associations of the past, betrayed her secret satisfaction and inward pride. She seemed gratified at Nathalie's attention.

"It is wrong in me," she said, "to be detaining you from your rest; good night, Mademoiselle Montolieu; may your first night's sleep under the roof of our house be peaceful and happy."

She spoke with the stately courtesy of a real châtelaine, drew the young girl towards her, stooped—for she was much taller—imprinted a kiss on her forehead, and glided out of the room.

It was not until the sound of her steps died away in the passage, and on the distant staircase, that Nathalie felt herself alone. She sat down on a low couch, and leaning back, looked around her with *naïf* and childish interest. The bed stood before her in a deep recess, shrouded by curtains of the clearest muslin; near it stood the wooden *prie-dieu* of the devout Constance, and not far from it, on a low cabinet of carved ebony, the gleaming oral mirror, with its tarnished frame, in which her more earthly sister surveyed herself before she died. These reminiscences charmed the romantic mind of Nathalie. The quaint old china which adorned the mantel-shelf, the pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses in hoops, and even a discolored mother-of-pearl table and work-box, gave a new interest to every thing around her; the sight of her trunk, unperceived till then, suddenly recalled her from the past to the present.

This day had been one of the few eventful days in her quiet life, and it now returned to her in its minutest incidents, with the fuss of the morning; the prize ceremony, at which she laughed, but which amused and interested her, in spite of her laughing; the breaking up, and the parting from a few pet pupils, who crowded around her, and gave her many a farewell kiss. She remembered how, when all was over, she had gone up to her room, and watched from the window a carriage, which bore away a gay young creature of sixteen, who was to return no more to school; how sad she felt, as that carriage wound along the dusty road, and vanished in the distance; how longingly she looked at the unknown regions of happiness and pleasure that extended beyond those green hills, and felt like a lady of romance, captive in her solitary bower, guarded by the Dantin dragon. How she wept a little at her loneliness, and then dried her tears, and read till dusk, when she went down to the garden to dream away an hour, until called in for quarrel, reproach, and dismissal. The interview with Charles Marceau, the scene with Mademoiselle Dantin, the meeting with the little Chevalier, the sudden appearance of Madame

Marceau,—all came back to her with the vividness of reality, until at length recurred the most startling remembrance of all; she, the poor, dependent girl, was now a guest in the chateau of Sainville. She looked around her, and smiled to herself, then rose, and opened the window, a real Gothic casement, with lozenge panes in lead casings. The night was dark; she could see nothing, save a bright light burning in the turret facing her. Through the glass panes and thin muslin curtains appeared the figure of a man, slowly pacing the room up and down. He looked taller than Charles Marceau, who, moreover, was not at home. Nathalie's heart beat a little; for though the distance was too great for her to distinguish his features, she felt that she was gazing on the master of Sainville. She softly closed the window, and after a little fit of musing, extinguished the lamp, and took possession of the downy bed which had formerly received the beautiful Adelaide. As the young girl sank into her voluptuous couch, and, by the faint, glimmering light which the dying lamp still shed, gazed on the antique, but not ungraceful, furniture of her apartment, she asked herself if some Arabian genie had not transported her there from the bare room she occupied at Mademoiselle Dantin's. None but pleasant visions now flitted before her; every thing seemed bright and hopeful as a fairy tale; the sense of security and rest, after the storms and chances of the day, was blended with the pleasurable sensations of her luxurious couch. As she abandoned herself to this indolent repose, thought gradually became less distinct; but her bed faced the window; the light still burned in the turret opposite, and every now and then she caught a glimpse of the dark figure, moving to and fro in its monotonous promenade. The sight exercised an irresistible and mysterious fascination upon her; every time the figure came within view, her look followed it until it vanished. At length, oppressed with fatigue and sleep, her eyes closed; the light still shone opposite, but she heeded it not; dreams, hopes, and mysterious imaginings had faded away; her head reclined on her pillow; her hands lay folded on her bosom; she had fallen into deep and peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER V.

The sun had risen; the sky was serene and blue, and the birds sang on a group of tall poplars near her window, when Nathalie awoke on the following morning. She rose quickly, and merely throwing a shawl around her, she hastened to open the window with childish impatience. Though she prudently kept in the background, lest she might be seen from the garden, or any part of the building, she could still enjoy the cool morning breeze, and the greater portion of the fine prospect below her.

It was a calm morning, silent, and somewhat chill; the sky, of a pale blue, was still tinged with the gray of early morn, save in the east, where the soft, rosy light of dawn still lingered. The trees, some of them already sere and yellow, were seen through a hazy mist, that glittered in the long horizontal rays of light; the freshness of earth and sky told the earliness of the hour.

Beneath her, Nathalie beheld the garden, with its three terraces, the last of which descended to the very edge of the shallow river that wound along Sainville; this garden now looked a small space in the midst of the surrounding grounds. Her glance rested for a while on its gravel walks, trim boxwood hedges, grassplots, and marble statues; then wandered over the grounds, laid out with graceful clumps of trees and groves of stately pine. At a distance, she beheld a little artificial lake, with its dark waters, that seemed to lie sleeping in the solemn shadow of a wide-spreading and melancholy cedar; farther on, in a still more secluded spot, rose a white temple, gleaming amidst the dark foliage of surrounding firs. Save on the side of Mademoiselle Dantin's school, the gardener's art had succeeded in concealing every trace of a boundary. Nathalie could only estimate the extent of the grounds by the landscape beyond; it spread far away on the other side of the winding road; and a fair Norman landscape it was, with low, swelling hills, secluded hamlets in green valleys, and silvery streams, glancing in the morning sun, now gliding visible through fertile plains, or winding far away in dark and overhanging woods. Nathalie looked long and eagerly.

"This cool Normandy is beautiful, after all," she thought, whilst her heart filled with admiration and joy. True joy is almost always religious; and it was before that open window, her hands clasped, her eyes still fixed on the glorious works of God, the cool breeze fanning her brow, that Nathalie slowly repeated her morning orisons. The house was still silent; she dressed leisurely, with more than usual care, and hesitated long between two very simple muslin dresses, one blue, the other pink; the pink was chosen as most becoming. During the progress of her toilet she never looked at the glass; Mademoiselle Dantin forbade all such toys of vanity to the teachers of her establishment, and long habit enabled Nathalie to do without their aid, but when she had seen that not one ungraceful fold disfigured the light drapery of her attire, that her hair, in spite of its becoming negligence, was quite secure, she turned towards the mirror, and wondered with a smile, "if Adelaide de Sainville had been so very much more beautiful."

Unlike those heroines who are as unconscious of their own loveliness as is a lamp of the light it diffuses, Nathalie knew very well that she was handsome, and often rejoiced in the consciousness of her fresh and youthful beauty, which, though it had failed to soften the morose schoolmistress, rendered her, and this also she knew, very pleasant and delightful in the eyes of others. But personal vanity was, after all, her least defect; she had other faults far more serious, far more fatal to herself and others, and without which this story need never have been written.

A thin, sallow but smartly-attired femme-de-chambre, in fantastic cap and extravagantly small apron, disturbed her reflections.

"Mon Dieu!" she observed with the fluency of speech and elegant precision of accent of the Parisan, "I hope I have not disturbed mademoiselle. Madame would be in despair. Madame only sent me to know whether mademoiselle needed my assistance, and would breakfast in her own room or in the salle-à-manger."

She spoke thus with a rapid look that comprised everything in the room from the least straggling article of dress down to Nathalie's solitary trunk. The young girl thanked her quietly, said she would breakfast below, and followed down stairs the polite femme-de-chambre, who offered to show her the way. She found the Canoness and her niece alone in the dining-room, a wide and cheerful-looking apartment on the ground floor, with a large glass door that led into a small quadrangular court, beyond which extended the garden. Aunt

Radegonde nodded to Nathalie with smiling welcome; Madame Marceau did not see or appear to see her until she stood by her side. She then exclaimed:

"Mademoiselle Montolieu!" with an apologetic start, half rose from her chair, held out the tips of her fingers to Nathalie with stately grace, and, sinking back in her seat, "hoped she had slept well." She hoped with a tone and look that said every one did sleep well, or ought to sleep well in the château of Sainville. With a smile Nathalie thanked her: "her sleep was always good." "Indeed!" said Madame Marceau, with a peculiar look; perhaps she thought it vulgar, as it no doubt is, to sleep soundly; at all events she drew out and applied the vinaigrette.

Good breeding and refinement, or rather the externals of these qualities, are generally considered as wholly precluding those vulgar manifestations of ill-temper, rudeness, impertinence, and similar feelings, which the unsophisticated display with such perfect frankness. But it does not thence follow that the well-bred and refined have not their little spites, little envious feelings, little assumptions of consequence to gratify; indeed they do gratify them very freely; all the difference lies in the manner; for there is a finish, a delicacy of touch in the polite impertinence of the well-bred which the under-bred may envy, but must never hope to attain. The slight that can be conveyed in a glance, in a gracious smile, in a wave of the hand, is often the *ne plus ultra* of art; what insult is so keen or so keenly felt as the polite insult which it is impossible to resent?

Madame Marceau, without being a very clever woman, had some talent and proficiency in this amiable accomplishment. She could put down any one, especially another woman, in the most gracious manner. She never was rude; indeed she was always studiously polite, courteous and stately, as so great a lady should be. Her manner was easy, her speech was fluent, her voice was soft; but her grace was only manner; her courtesy sprang from jealous pride. When the fortunes of her family were at their lowest ebb, Rosalie de Sainville had married a rich plebeian merchant of Hâvre, whose speedy ruin and death left her the bitter regret of a useless *mésalliance.* The sudden restoration of family dignity effected by her brother, awoke in all its strength her embittered and long-repressed pride. In spite of her long line of ancestors she had still something of the *parvenue;* she felt more jealous of her original position than if she had never descended from it; others might afford to be simple and careless of rank; she felt that she could not, especially with Nathalie. Two sins lay at the young girl's door: she had attracted the attention of Charles Marceau; worse still, she was the daughter of a man who, in Madame Marceau's fallen fortunes and humbled state, had without undue presumption, hoped to make her his wife.

The breakfast, at which Monsieur de Sainville did not appear, was a plain meal. Madame Marceau held *bourgeois* abundance in horror; but it was served in costly Sèvres porcelain, on silver salvers, with the crest of the Sainvilles. Nathalie bore the studied politeness of her hostess with perfect calmness; she received the courtesy as genuine, and allowed the impertinence to drop all harmless at her feet. The repast, though thus converted into a sort of tilt *avec armes courtoises*, was quiet enough. The naïve curiosity and garrulousness of the Canoness amused Nathalie, but evidently provoked her niece, who colored, and bit her lip at every fresh indiscretion of Aunt Radegonde. As soon as breakfast was over, Madame Marceau proposed a walk in the garden, to Nathalie, who readily assented. The Canoness seemed willing to accompany them, but her niece reminded her, in her kindest tones, "that those early walks always fatigued her so much." Aunt Radegonde yielded, with evident regret.

The garden was laid out in the stately style of Louis XIV's reign. Broad gravel walks surrounded quaintly-shaped plots of flowers; low hedges of box-wood, cut close, with niches for statues of heathen deities, crossed one another in intricate windings, or extended into little avenues, ornamented on either side with long rows of stiff orange-trees, in their green boxes, and a sparkling *jet d'eau* rose into the air from a large marble fish-pond in the middle of the first terrace. Notwithstanding the monotony of this style of gardening, which made it quite a relief when they came to a secluded grass-plot, with its solitary nymph, Nathalie was struck with its antique majesty and grandeur of design, both of which at once seemed to carry her back to the stately age of the magnificent Louis XIV. Madame Marceau, who paced the broad walks with slow step and erect majesty of bearing, smiled complacently at her frankly-expressed admiration.

"Yes," she carelessly observed, "this old gardening is, as you say, very characteristic. This garden was designed by the famous Le Nôtre. It suits the style of the château; *Renais-*

sance, as you know, of course. On the spot which the present building occupies, once stood a rude Gothic pile, erected by Hugo, first sire of Sainville; for we never had a title in our family; we are the De Sainvilles—no more."

"Like the old Rohans of Brittany," demurely said Nathalie, quoting the old motto, "Roi ne puis; Prince ne daigne; Rohan je suis."

"Precisely," replied Madame Marceau, much gratified. "You have quite a knowledge of history, Mademoiselle Montolieu, and you are right; titles are the gifts of kings, but what court favor can bestow blood and race?"

"I wonder where you got your plebeian name of Marceau?" thought Nathalie, glancing at the proud lady, who continued:

"Armand de Sainville erected, under the reign of Francis I, the present château, on which his scutcheon and motto stil appear."

"Pray what is the true sense of that motto?" asked Nathalie.

Madame Marceau shook her head and smiled.

"A sensitive point, Mademoiselle Montolieu—a sensitive point," she significantly replied. "The vulgar legend, which you have no doubt heard, says that this only desire was one of love, but it is not so."

"Indeed!"

"No, Mademoiselle Montolieu, it is not so. The truth is," she added, with great candor, "that we are the most obstinate, *têtu* race in all Normandy. When we wish for a thing, no matter what—say a horse, a picture, a piece of land, any thing, in short,—we must have it, no matter at what price; indeed, we will have it. It is just the same when we oppose a thing; that thing cannot take place; all our energies go against it; we oppose that thing, in short."

"Extraordinary firmness," said Nathalie, with ill-concealed irony.

"No, Mademoiselle Montolieu; I beg your pardon; no, it is not firmness," said Madame Marceau, with dignified denial. "Heaven forbid that I should thus screen our fatal hereditary failing. No; it is mere obstinacy, mere haughty will—the will of the De Sainvilles."

"Why, madam, you will make me feel quite timid," observed Nathalie, smiling.

"Nay, nay, I hope not," graciously rejoined the elder lady; "I assure you we are far from wishing to inspire such feelings; besides, you must not think that we are merely obstinate. No, my dear Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, bending her dark and searching glance on the young girl's frank face, "we can indeed be enemies; but we must be provoked: and, believe me, to those who confide in us, we can be friends,—true friends."

She familiarly drew Nathalie's arm within her own, and softly laid her handsome hand, all sparkling with jewels, on the young girl's, as she thus addressed her, with much emotion. The look, tone, and gesture were so significant, that Nathalie felt as if a reply were expected; but as she did not happen to be in a mood to answer so much condescension suitably, she remained silent. They had reached by this the end of the first terrace, and were going to descend a flight of steps that led to the second, when Madame Marceau, who kindly attributed the young girl's silence to timidity, paused, to let her look at the fine prospect over the surrounding grounds. She listened to her expressions of admiration with as much complacency as if she had been the exclusive mistress of all they beheld.

"We are making great improvements," said she, speaking, as usual, in the plural number, and in her own stately way; "planting trees, whose growth we shall never see; but as the property remains in the family, that is not of much consequence."

"I had always understood," heedlessly observed Nathalie, "that Monsieur de Sainville was the last of his name."

Madame Marceau bit her lip, but drew herself up with cool *hauteur*.

"Monsieur de Sainville may be the last of his name," she dryly replied; "but though he has no child, and does not intend marrying, he has a nephew, Mademoiselle Montolieu, who succeeds, of course, not only to the family property, but, what is far more important, to the family name. Well, André, what is it?" she added, somewhat sharply.

This question was addressed to a sun-burnt looking man, a gardener, seemingly, and who now stood before Madame Marceau in a respectful attitude. "I have taken the liberty of addressing madame," said he, in a submissive tone, "in the hope that madame would be kind enough to intercede for me."

"Well, what is it?" said the lady, smiling encouragingly.

"Oh! if I only knew it, I assure madame that I should not complain: but it is hard to be dismissed for neglect of orders without so much as knowing what order has been neglected Yet if madame would only speak for me, monsieur would perhaps relent for the sake of my wife and children."

Madame Marceau looked disconcerted for a moment; but she soon recovered with a cough, and observed, with dignified gravity:

"André, you know us; we are just, liberal masters, but we require, we exact obedience. I verily believe we would sooner forgive dishonesty itself than neglect of orders. I think I told you so expressly when you entered our service; I feel sorry for you, but you must leave."

"But surely, madame will feel how hard it is to go this very day; to be sure monsieur has been extremely liberal, and told the steward to give me not only my due, but much more; still it is hard to leave one's work unfinished; there is a whole plantation that another will only spoil, I am sure. If I could only have had longer notice, and if monsieur had not been so strict in saying that I must leave this very day——"

"Impossible, André," interrupted Madame Marceau; "it is our maxim, our settled principle,—rather to pay double what we owe than to keep a servant with whom we feel dissatisfied. You have been treated on that principle; I feel sorry for you; but we cannot break through such rules for any individual case."

"But perhaps madame, who knows all about it, will be good enough to tell me what orders I have neglected," persisted André. "I should have asked monsieur himself if he had not left the château so early; and the steward assured me monsieur had only said 'neglect of orders.' I should always feel grateful if madame would only tell me."

Madame Marceau drew herself up with mysterious majesty.

"We are not in the habit of giving explanations," said she, coldly; "you can go, André; we wish to continue our walk. Tell your wife to speak to Amanda before she leaves; Amanda will, I dare say, have something for her. We wish you well, André, but our rules and principles must be carried out."

A wave of the hand told the supplicant that he was dismissed.

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Madame Marceau, as he left them; "I really compassionate his case, but some faults are positively quite unpardonable."

A quick step in the gravel walk behind them caused Ma dame Marceau to look round as she spoke thus. The new comer was the elegant lady's maid.

"Madame," said she, hastily addressing her mistress.

"Amanda," severely interrupted Madame Marceau, "how is this? Have I not made it a particular request that my morning walk should never be interrupted? But this is not the only recent instance of neglect of orders I have discovered. Why it was only this morning I perceived the thing I had expressly asked you to do had been omitted. Amanda, I may say, and you probably know it, every one indeed knows it, that justness mingled with due strictness is our family peculiarity. We are kind masters, we pay well, but obeyed we will be. Amanda, why did you not put the Valenciennes lace quilling around my morning gown?"

"I am sure," demurely said Amanda, "that disrespect of madame's orders was the last thing I intended; but I would not put on the quilling until I had appealed to madame's excellent taste. For as I was saying, my late mistress, Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson, would never allow me to put any quilling to her morning gowns. She would not hear of such a thing, even in her last illness."

"Madame d'Onesson had her way and I have mine," frigidly said Madame Marceau; "I beg that in future you will attend to my orders; there is André, whom we have been compelled to dismiss for similar negligence. It is extraordinary, but really servants do not seem to understand that we have them to do that which we request to have done. And now, may I know why, in spite of my prohibition, you have interrupted my walk?"

"Only to give madame this letter," modestly replied Amanda, respectfully handing a letter to her mistress as she spoke; "and I am sure, if the man who brought it had not said it was from Monsieur Charles, and very important, I should never have taken the liberty of breaking through madame's express rules; for, as I was saying, we all know that madame is as strict as she is generous."

Madame Marceau coughed a mollified cough, and slightly apologizing to Nathalie, she opened and read the letter. Her countenance darkened as she perused the contents.

"Where is the man who brought this?" she asked, in her sharpest tones.

"In the hall, waiting for madame's answer."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, will you excuse me? I find I must go in, and it would be a sin to ask you to return to the house on so fine a morning."

Nathalie having declared that she would indeed greatly prefer continuing her walk, she was left alone. She thoughtfully descended the steps leading to the second terrace, wondering why the letter from her son had annoyed Madame Marceau so much, and whether it bore any reference to herself.

She found that this second terrace was laid out in the same antique style which distinguished the first. A low wall covered with ivy, and partly concealed by a semicircle of evergreens, extended between the flights of steps that led down to the terrace on either side. Attracted by a low plashing sound, Nathalie stepped within the space thus inclosed. She found herself in a narrow grass-plot, with a plain stone fountain in the centre A clear, slender jet of water rose into the air, and fell down again into its shallow basin with the sound she had heard. In a low, broad niche, hollowed out of the ivied wall, reclined the figure of a sculptured nymph. One arm supported her head, the other hung down loosely by her side ; her eyes were closed ; her marble features expressed the serenity of sleep ; the whole attitude was one of deep repose. A beehive stood close by. Nathalie paused, and wondered as she looked, in what consisted the charms of this narrow spot. In its seclusion, and the sense of solitude by which it was accompanied—in the dark and melancholy foliage of those northern trees—in the fair image of sleep, hallowing all around, and seemingly lulled to its deep slumbers by the low sound of falling waters and the bee's murmuring hum—lay that charm, unexplained, though deeply felt.

Another flight of steps led Nathalie to the end of the garden, if garden it might be called, being now a mere grassy slope bounded by the river, and extending without further barrier into the grounds. On her left, she beheld at a distance the wall which divided Monsieur de Sainville's property from Mademoiselle Dantin's garden. On her right she could see nothing save wide lawns, with groves of spreading beech-trees, dark masses of the pyramidal pine, and the little lake shining in the distance.

As she walked down to the water's edge, stepping into the high and waving grass which filled the air with its wild fragrance, a whole crowd of tiny winged insects arose on her path. She paused near the hollow trunk of a decayed willow ; near her a group of silver-leaved aspens trembled in the sun with a low rustling sound; the water flowed quietly in its pebbly bed; whilst around was heard the ceaseless hum of the bees from the neighboring hive. On the opposite bank, formed by the wide arch of two large beech-trees, whose spreading shadow slept over the dark yet transparent waters of the river at her feet, extended a rural landscape of calm loveliness. A narrow pasture valley, sheltered by green hills; a herd of cattle grazing quietly in the cool morning shade; the light mist fading away before the early sun; no human dwelling visible, but every thing wrapped in the silence and repose of the hour,—formed a scene so tranquil and so fair that it instantly reminded Nathalie of a picture by Claude Lorraine which she had seen as a child in an old château of Provence. The absence of all ungraceful objects—the clear, golden-colored light—the deep and almost holy serenity of his favorite scenes—marked every thing she now saw. She was turning away from this lovely prospect with regret, when she suddenly stopped short, as if rooted to the earth. Charles Marceau stood before her.

With the exception that this was day, and that it was evening when she saw him before, Nathalie might have imagined this to be the continuation of their former interview. The young man looked as cool and composed as when in Mademoiselle Dantin's garden; more so, indeed, he could not look. He stood in the same attitude, with his face turned towards Nathalie. His features, thin, pale, and yet strikingly handsome, looked thinner and paler from the mass of dark hair which fell down almost to his shoulders. The expression of the brow and mouth instantly reminded Nathalie of Madame Marceau; but the eyes, large, clear, and hazel, like her's, had another look. This might be from the eyelids, which drooped rather too much, or from the nearness and fixedness of the pupils, which now rendered it difficult for Nathalie to meet his glance, and made her feel not so much that he was looking at her, as that he looked in the direction in which she stood. In return to his deep salutation, she gave him a frigid bow. He stood so exactly before her that it was not easy for her to walk on.

"I see you are still deeply offended," said he, in that low and musical tone which, in spite of her anger, had struck her on the preceding evening; "alas! can penitence for a past error avail nothing?"

He paused, as if expecting an answer. Nathalie, however, with serious mien and downcast look, gave him none.

"Pray remember," he continued, "how I stood placed. We often met: I might look, but never speak; I might write, yet hope for no reply; I loved you, but might not tell it."

Nathalie colored, and hastened to interrupt him. "I will forgive last evening's intrusion," said she, coldly, "on condition that it is never mentioned again."

"You forgive me," he replied; "is that all?"

Nathalie looked up with surprise. She met his look; it had now the keen and watchful expression which had already struck her. Seeing that she did not speak, he continued,

"We are told to forgive our enemies. Is there, for those that love us, no other feeling than forgiveness?"

"I understand you, sir," said Nathalie, eyeing him with a firm, clear look; "but I am not bound to answer a feeling I never sought, nor to feel gratitude——"

"Gratitude!" he interrupted, with something like scorn; "who speaks of gratitude? I detest gratitude—it is only fit for slavish souls, whom benefits can win. It is a feeling I have never known, and care not to exact—least of all from you—you," he added, in a lower tone, "who inspire me with another ambition, and far other hopes."

Nathalie looked annoyed and disdainful.

"I believe," quietly continued Charles Marceau, "that by speaking thus I impress you unfavorably. Forgive me; I must speak as I feel, and that is within no sphere of conventional or formal rules. You may think me presumptuous, yet trust me, I do not mistake your present feelings. I will not say that you hate me, that I am disagreeable to you; I believe I am totally indifferent to you, and that, comparatively speaking, you care no more for me than for the grass beneath your feet."

The last words were uttered with much bitterness; yet, to Nathalie's surprise, the young man composedly resumed:

"I am content it should be so; I am content to find you proud and disdainful, if such is your whim. A hundred times sooner would I see you thus, than find you yielding a feeble return to feelings you will never understand until the day arrives when you fully share them."

"And that day, sir," sharply replied Nathalie, who felt irritated at the tone he had taken, "is, I promise you, still far distant."

Charles did not seem alarmed at this threat. He smiled again. "Once more," said he, "I must beg of you to forgive me if my speech is not confined within conventional limits.

Nothing is further from my intention than to utter a word calculated to offend you. If, cold as you are now, I yet express a belief in your future affection, that belief is not founded on my own merits. I trust to the depth and fervor of my love for return."

"We will not argue that point," coldly said Nathalie; "Madame Marceau is waiting for me. Be so good as to allow me to proceed."

"One moment more, I beseech you," submissively said Charles Marceau; "I depart to-day for Paris: many months must elapse before I behold you again. Whilst your thought and image remain ever present to me, may I hope you will sometimes remember me?"

Nathalie, highly indignant at this request, could not repress the taunt which rose to her lips.

"Sir," said she, with an ironical smile, destined to punish his presumption, "you have so much faith and hope at your command, that you can well dispense with so paltry an auxiliary as memory."

"You are severe," bitterly replied Charles Marceau, whilst his cheek took a sallower tinge; "but," he added, with a fixed look, which made her color rise, "you cannot and shall not prevent me from loving you, and that with a passion and fervor which, could they be revealed by words, would not, perhaps, leave you quite so calm and cold as I leave you now."

He turned away without another word or look.

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CHAPTER VI.

Nathalie remained standing in the same place as if rooted to the spot by indignant amazement. Her color rose and she bit her lip, alike vexed and astonished at herself, for having allowed the young man to proceed so far unchecked.

The incident of the letter recurred to her as particularly significant: she could not doubt that it was the means Charles Marceau had taken to meet her. The concealment of which he made use showed her very plainly the light in which his family viewed his attachment.

"They need not fear," she thought, with secret scorn, "the poor teacher of Mademoiselle Dantin's school will not find it so hard to live without the heir of the great Sainville race, who, though so daring with her, can, it seems, be timid enough with them."

Not caring for a longer walk, she returned to the château. She would willingly have proceeded to her own room at once, but the Canoness meeting her on the staircase made her enter the drawing-room; Madame Marceau was not present. Aunt Radegonde took her usual place, made the young girl sit down on the low seat by her side, began to knit, and asked how she liked the garden.

"Yes," she thoughtfully observed, when Nathalie had said how much she liked it: "yes, our old château is a pleasant place; here was I born and bred, and so were Armand and Rosalie; and here I lived until my poor brother died, when Armand said at once the place must be sold to help to cover his father's debts, and passed his word to the creditors to work out the rest, no matter at what cost. He went away for years, —we had to go to Hâvre; yet I never have understood how Sainville could be sold."

"And was it sold?" asked Nathalie.

"I suppose so; for other people came and we left; but they changed nothing. This room looks just as it looked on the day when I stood at the door and turned round to take a last glance."

"How glad you must have been to return," said Nathalie, touched at her simplicity and frankness.

The Canoness laid her little hand on the young girl's shoulder, and looked wistfully into her face. "My dear child," she sadly replied, "may you never know how sad the place we once loved best may become. Sorrowful as I was when I left, I left not alone; but I was alone when I returned. I found nothing but gaiety going on,—but it was mirth that saddened me; the house was full of company,—to me it seemed vacant."

She looked around her, and her eyes filled with tears; but age loves not to dwell on sorrowful recollections,—the cloud soon passed away from the cheerful features of the Canoness. She urged Nathalie to speak, and peremptorily forbade her to call her Madame, which she pronounced much too formal.

"Though, to be sure," she added, drawing herself up, "I have a right to the title, being a Canoness. I am not mademoiselle,—which would be ridiculous at my age,—but Madame Radegonde de Sainville, and so the servants, whom I keep at a great distance, always call me; but you,—let me see,—do you mind calling me Marraine? I might very well be your godmother. Indeed, I feel almost confident that if your poor father had married some one of Sainville, instead of going off to Provence for a wife, I should have been your godmother. Well shall it be Marraine, or is your real godmother still living?"

"No, she was my aunt, and died three years age in Provence."

"And have you no friends in Sainville, Petite?"

"None, save my sister, who was brought up here," replied Nathalie, smiling at the familiar name the Canoness had already found for her.

"But your sister is very fond of you, I am sure," shrewdly rejoined Aunt Radegonde, with an air of mingled bonhomie and finesse. "Oh! I know what an elder sister is," she added. as Nathalie smiled in reply. "When your aunt died in Provence, and you must have been very young then, for indeed you are a child still,"—Nathalie looked a little indignant,—"our good sister Rose took the little orphan, and became to her more like a second mother than like a strange sister; only I cannot understand why she let her be at that sour Mademoiselle Dantin's?"

"Because Rose is a dependent, like myself," replied Nathalie, "and resided with an aunt far more sour than Mademoiselle Dantin; all she could do was to find me in her school a situation I was glad to get."

"Depend upon it, Petite, your sister acted for the best; yes, your sister Rose is your friend," she emphatically added.

"She is, indeed; and though she so often finds fault with me, I never can feel angry."

"What does she say then?"

"That I am proud, rebellious, and resentful; that I love impossibilities and disdain the real."

"Your sister is a little severe," said the Canoness, giving Nathalie a puzzled look, "but though she of course means well, all this is not quite correct, is it?"

"Indeed it is," frankly replied Nathalie; "but then Rose has a right to be severe; she is nearly perfect herself."

"It is quite proper you should think so," decisively said the Canoness; "but for my part, I do not doat on perfect people. I know a person of that sort, one who seldom or ever does wrong; but for all that you cannot love that person. That person, my dear, never scolds, never gets into a passion.

never says a cross word, but just acts in a quiet, underhand sort of way that is perfectly chilling. You never know how you are getting on with that person; by which I do not mean to say that person is deceitful. No, but that person is just like a looking-glass; look in front as long as you like, it is all very well; but attempt to turn round, to peep behind, you see—nothing. You must not imagine, my dear," added the Canoness, after a brief pause, and looking at Nathalie very fixedly, "that I am talking of any one in this house—no," she shrewdly observed, "that person is far away." This assertion was uttered quite triumphantly.

"That person must be very remarkable," thoughtfully said Nathalie, attentively looking at Aunt Radegonde as she spoke.

"Remarkable! well no, not at first sight, at least; and yet that person is no common individual."

"You said perfect," quickly rejoined Nathalie.

"Well, perfect was perhaps too strong a word. Yet it is difficult to find fault with that person: and a person who in spite of all you can say manages to be always in the right is very nearly perfect. Only it is a provoking sort of perfection; I do not like it," very emphatically added Aunt Radegonde; "do you?"

"Not at all," replied Nathalie, quite as heartily.

Here the voice of Madame Marceau was heard on the landing, talking to one of the servants.

Aunt Radegonde looked alarmed, bent down, and exclaimed in a hurried whisper:—

"My dear child, do not let Madame Marceau know I spoke to you about that person."

"Is Madame Marceau that person?" rapidly thought Nathalie, as the lady entered the room; but the aspect of the ruffled brow, and the sound of the sharp irritated voice as she recorded the delinquency of some servant, did not give the idea of one who never spoke a cross word, or never scolded.

"Really," she said, with any thing but a bland voice, "servants do not seem to appreciate the privilege of living in a family like this; they will not obey."

"When we had but one servant——" began Aunt Radegonde.

"The dismissal of André has produced no effect," quickly interrupted her niece.

"André! Do you say André is dismissed?"

Madame Marceau majestically seated herself, and sententiously replied in answer to the eager look and inquiry of her aunt, "that André was dismissed."

"Why so?" asked the Canoness, looking much chagrined; "he is so honest and industrious."

"Very true, aunt, but we require obedience in our servants."

"What order has he neglected? I am sure the poor fellow will only be too glad to repair his fault."

"We are not in the habit of entering into explanations with our servants," replied her dignified niece.

"But what has he done, Rosalie?"

Madame Marceau looked mysterious.

"Ay, there it is!" ironically exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, rocking herself in her chair; "the man is sent away, he does not know why,—I do not know why,—do not believe you know why,—nobody knows, in short. You call that will, *I* call it tyranny. You may tell any one I said so if you like; if others are afraid, I warn any one who likes to hear, that I am not."

She spoke loudly and looked defiant.

"Aunt," patronizingly said her niece, "you surely ought to be accustomed to the manifestations of our family peculiarity—*will*, though you do not possess so much of it."

"I have as much will as any one," sharply interrupted the Canoness.

"Be it so," replied Madame Marceau, with a gracious smile and an Olympic inclination of the head, "be it so, dear aunt; but as I was saying, you ought to be accustomed to the manifestations of our family peculiarity—will. You know my impartiality; I do not justify this inexorable will;—I deplore it. But such we are, and all I can say is, I feel truly sorry for those who unfortunately suffer from this peculiarity."

A daughter of the Atridæ could not have lamented with more solemn dignity the melancholy fatality attending her race.

"I tell you," testily rejoined Aunt Radegonde, "it is not will, but the despotism and caprice I know of old.—There!" With this last bold defiance she resumed her knitting.

"My good aunt," replied Madame Marceau, becoming more polite and more cool, "excuse me: energy is not despotism; justice is not caprice. These qualities have restored our family to its pristine splendor:—they will keep it there. We may regret that those inflexible virtues should interfere with the happiness of any person, howsoever humble that person may be; we may also regret to be misunderstood, by our own relatives especially, but we really cannot help it."

"I never meant—" began Aunt Radegonde, looking flurried.

"Pray, do not mention it; it is quite immaterial," kindly interrupted Madame Marceau. And having thus put down her aunt she turned towards Nathalie, asked how she had liked the garden: was sure she would like the grounds; informed her that the domain of Sainville was much admired, and hoped to have many pleasant walks over it with Mademoiselle Montolieu. The Canoness joined in the hope, and looked at her niece, who looked at the wall. But Aunt Radegonde, who seemed anxious to be restored to favor, persisted.

"Yes," she said, "we shall have many pleasant walks, all three, or rather all four together; for Armand will accompany us, and he talks so well! Ah! Petite, you should hear him and his sister, sometimes!"

"My brother is indeed a man of varied acquirements," condescended to observe Madame Marceau, without, however, looking at her aunt. "I regret that he should be gone to Marmont; but he is to be home at five. I have no doubt he will be greatly pleased to become acquainted with Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"How long is this to last?" impatiently thought Nathalie, who began to feel heartily wearied of Madame Marceau's protecting grandeur and strained courtesy.

It lasted the whole day, which appeared to the young girl one of the longest she had ever spent. Madame Marceau was not one of those talkers who tire out by their inexhaustible volubility; her language was not trite, common-place, or ridiculous; but she had a way of spreading out her wealth, her state, her lineage, as if these were to be worn at full length, like the robe and ample train of her grandmother. The little she said—for she did not speak much—was all on the theme, more implied, however, than expressed, of her greatness. If Nathalie looked out of the window and admired the fine avenue of trees leading to the château, she was told of how many centuries was their growth, and by which of the Sainvilles they had been planted; if she glanced at a picture, she was informed how long it had been in the family, or if it was a portrait, which of the Sainvilles it represented. In short, the past and present glory of the Sainville race evidently reigned supreme in the lady's thought. Aunt Radegonde knitted assiduously and spoke very little. She did indeed let out one or two indiscreet observations, but a look, and a "dear aunt," from her niece silenced her effectually.

"What a cheerless day!" she observed towards evening, and she laid down her knitting with a slight yawn.

"Very cheerless indeed," said Nathalie; and glad of some excuse to leave her seat, she rose and went up to one of the large and deep windows that looked on the avenue.

It had been raining all the afternoon, and it was raining still. The sky was dark, dreary, and obscured by gloomy clouds that chased each other rapidly along. Gusts of wind bowed the tall trees of the avenue, and the winding road and landscape beyond it could be seen only through the torrents of slanting rain.

"What dreadful weather Armand has for his ride home," observed Madame Marceau, in a tone of concern.

"Perhaps he will not come," said the Canoness.

"My dear aunt," replied her niece, in her sententious way, "we never break a promise; Armand left word that he would be home at five, and at five we must expect him. As for the weather, he has been so great a traveller that I really think he feels indifferent to it."

No more was said until the clock struck five.

"That is strange!" said Madame Marceau, with stately surprise.

"*Chère* Petite," observed Aunt Radegonde turning towards Nathalie, "you will take cold near that window."

"I am only looking at the clouds," carelessly replied Nathalie; "they run along the sky so fast that they look like living things."

She lingered a while longer near the window, before resuming her seat by the Canoness.

"Oh! there comes Monsieur de Sainville," said Madame Marceau, as the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard in the avenue below. She looked at the clock impatiently, and when a few minutes had elapsed, left the room. There was a brief silence.

"You will spoil your sight with that embroidery; there is no light," at length observed the Canoness, addressing Nathalie, whose glance seemed rivetted to her work.

"Thank you, I am used to it," she replied in a low and somewhat flurried tone. A step was heard on the staircase; she laid down her work on her lap, then took it up again nervously.

The door opened, and Madame Marceau entered alone. Her brow seemed slightly overcast.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, addressing the young girl in a tone which sounded sharp and irritated, through all its softness and courtesy, "my brother is very anxious to see you. Would you mind accompanying me to the library."

Nathalie rose in some trepidation.

"Where are you taking her?" asked the Canoness.

"Armand wishes to speak to Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"What does he want with her?" pettishly inquired Aunt Radegonde.

"My brother, Monsieur de Sainville, wishes to speak to Mademoiselle Montolieu, his guest," replied Madame Marceau, drawing Nathalie's arm within her own, and speaking with one of her grand airs.

"He could speak to her here," returned the Canoness, who could be pertinacious enough when she chose; "and I do not see why he will have her in the library—unless it be to scare her, as he scares every one," she added, under her breath.

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a look, which made the little Canoness fidget in her chair.

"Really, dear aunt," said she with an affected gayety, that was intended to conceal a good deal of irritation, "one might think I was leading our young friend to the *antre* of some ogre. Fortunately," she added, with a keen look at Nathalie, "Mademoiselle Montolieu does not share your apprehensions."

The Canoness looked corrected and penitent, and did not venture to breathe another syllable, as the two ladies left the room.

"I suppose," thought Nathalie, as they silently proceeded towards the library, "that Monsieur de Sainville is a second edition of his sister,—a tall, fine man, very stately, very courteous, and very patronizing."

She glanced at her companion as she came to this conclusion, and the lowering expression of Madame Marceau's brow led her to believe that this interview was little to the lady's taste.

The library was situated on the ground-floor, and the entrance to it faced the door leading to the dining-room. It was soon reached; and as Madame Marceau's hand rested on the bronze door-handle, Nathalie felt the mingled shyness and curiosity of her years blending with a disagreeable feeling of uneasiness, caused by the prospect of meeting one of whom, whether rightfully or not, she had not been led to conceive a very favorable opinion. Her companion smiled, and gave her an encouraging look.

"Pray, Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, in a low and emphatic tone, "do not feel any uneasiness. We are your friends; we mean you well."

She pressed her hand, and opened the door as she spoke.

The library was a wide apartment very simply furnished, with shelves of books, busts, and a few pictures. A vase filled with choice flowers stood on a large table covered with papers; near it burned a lamp with a clear, cheerful light. A large glass door revealed the garden beyond, with its distant trees now bending before the autumn blast; in the dark sky above already shone a pale and watery moon, ever and anon obscured by passing clouds. The dreary aspect of nature heightened the air of warmth and comfort of every thing within.

As the two ladies entered, a gentleman, who was standing near the fire-place, turned round and advanced to receive them. Madame Marceau walked up to him, leading Nathalie by the hand, and addressing him as her "dear Armand," introduced her companion to him with great stateliness. She then caused Nathalie to be seated, stood by her chair, uttering in her smooth tones a few common-place remarks, framed a plausible excuse, and retired, leaving the young girl alone with her brother.

"This is very childish," thought Nathalie, as she felt her heart beating rapidly and her cheeks gradually covering over with a crimson flush; and she found her emotion the more inexcusable that a look had told her there was nothing so singular in Monsieur de Sainville's appearance as to excite feelings of uneasiness or alarm.

The master of Sainville did not in the least fulfil the idea which, from the distant glimpses she had formerly obtained of him, and still more from her own recent conjectures, the young girl had formed of his appearance. She had thought to find a tall, dark man, sallow, harsh-featured, rather handsome, but of a severe, forbidding aspect, and long past middle age. But as he stood by the table, near which she sat, eyeing her with a quiet yet penetrating glance, speaking in a rich, harmonious voice, which seemed the gift of the family, and addressing her with that indescribable French ease which in his case was united to great simplicity of manner, she was compelled to confess that nothing could be more different from what she had anticipated or imagined,—nothing especially more opposed to the showy but unpleasing Madame Marceau.

Monsieur de Sainville was not much above the usual height, and of a spare figure, in which there was nothing to strike the eye. Still less did his countenance seem likely to attract attention; it was neither plain nor handsome; Nathalie was surprised at seeing only a serious face, intellectual indeed, but pale and mild, and still further softened by hair of a light chestnut, and a slight moustache of the same hue. Without being young, he was still in the prime and vigor of life, and evidently much younger than his sister.

"And is this Monsieur de Sainville?" thought Nathalie, looking at him again with inward disappointment. Yet this second glance, though it beheld no more than the first, impressed her very differently.

There was something in the settled pallor of the features, in the breadth and calmness of the brow, in the clear glance of the dark-blue eyes, in the decisive arch of the nose, in the firmly-compressed lips and curved chin, and above all, in the well-defined though not harsh outlines of the whole countenance, which no longer gave Nathalie the idea of gentleness. The mild expression which had first struck her, now resembled more a settled and unruffled calm, the result, perhaps, of a disposition serene by nature, and not easily disturbed by outward events, or, as she felt more inclined to think, the only external sign of a strong and silent will at rest. The whole face forcibly reminded her of a medallion of Bonaparte in her possession; not in beauty, for Monsieur de Sainville was by no means handsome; not in the cast of the features, for his were essentially northern; but in innate power and marble-like repose. Indeed that countenance, which had at first seemed so quiet in character, now looked to Nathalie fraught with meaning, but with a meaning she vainly sought to read. She looked and felt baffled; like one who beholds an inscription engraved in unknown characters on a stone tablet; it is there visible, indeed, to the eye, but inscrutable to thought, and though seen, not the less a mystery.

Whilst these thoughts passed rapidly through the young girl's mind, her host continued to address her; he was regretting, in courteous speech, the business which had prevented him from meeting her sooner. To her surprise, he was quite aware of her parentage, and mentioned her father, whom he remembered, in terms of respect and esteem, that gratified her deeply. Indeed he seemed bent on placing her at her ease When he had succeeded in dispelling her first embarrassment, he gradually dropped into a more business-like manner, polite still, but which, as Nathalie felt, was destined to lead them to the real object of this interview.

"Apologies are weak," said he, addressing her with grave earnestness, "yet I must apologize—I must express my deep regret for what has happened. Until yesterday evening I little suspected that you had been subjected to annoyance from a member of my family; I should still be as ignorant, had I not met my nephew, as he left Mademoiselle Dantin's garden. To Madame Marceau, his mother, and my sister, I entrusted, as was most fitting, the task of relieving you from an unpleasant and unmerited position. I know this is a delicate subject—perhaps I ought to leave it wholly to Madame Marceau; but I have a principle, from which I do not lightly swerve, always to do that myself which I can really do. If I allude, however, to these circumstances, it is, in the first place, to assure you of my sorrow at the disagreeable consequences of my nephew's imprudence; in the second, to hope that you will be so good as to consider this house your home, until a more eligible one offers for your acceptance."

He spoke in a brief, business-like tone, yet with a quiet simplicity, evidently meant to dispel every sense of obligation. Nathalie did not the less feel bound to thank him; he quickly interrupted her.

"Nay," said he, politely still, but quite decisively, "so commonplace an act of duty requires no acknowledgments."

Nathalie made no reply. A short, embarrassed pause succeeded. Monsieur de Sainville seemed to wish to say something more, yet he remained silent; he left his place, returned to it again, but did not speak. Nathalie felt intuitively that he was looking at her. She glanced up—it was so; but though his look was both fixed and thoughtful, it caused her no embarrassment: this protracted silence became, however, somewhat awkward.

"I fear, sir," said she, half rising from her seat, "that I am intruding on your leisure."

"No, no," he quickly replied. "To tell you the truth," he added, more leisurely, "our conversation is not yet ended."

Nathalie felt and looked uneasy.

"Some matters," he resumed, in his business-like way, "require frankness; it is then—as, indeed, it almost always is

--the most honorable, the most easy course to pursue. I should not have troubled you to come here, Mademoiselle Montolieu, since I could have had the pleasure of seeing you in the presence of my aunt and sister, had I not felt myself bound to communicate to you certain facts which you probably do not know, but which you certainly ought to know. But first I must assure you that over my nephew and his feelings I claim not the least authority. You will therefore understand that, so far as he is concerned, I do not seek, I do not wish to interfere. Nor do I presume to inquire into your private feelings; I only feel that you are my guest, that it is my duty not to allow you to be deceived, even indirectly. All I wish to state is, that my sister has for some time planned a marriage between her son and a friend of hers, Mademoiselle de Jussac; that after agreeing, he has now refused to marry that lady, and that his mother has declared she will never give her consent—with which the law will not yet allow him to dispense—to his marriage with any other woman. She is determined not to yield, and so is he, for they are much alike in person and in temper; if he has, therefore, deceived himself, so far as to state the contrary to you, believe me he is wholly mistaken. My perfect knowledge of this, the advantage I have over you in years and experience, my position as your host, entitle me, perhaps, to consider myself as standing towards you, for some time at least, in the relation of guardian and a friend. I have therefore entered into these explanations, in order that you may know how to guide your actions. You can now weigh the exact cost of what, at your age, is called the happiness of life, of what is often only the dream of a day. You will have time to discriminate the caprice of youth from its sincere feeling. If you doubt, you can easily look on the past as null; if your faith is strong, you can wait, and refuse to let any authority, any human being stand between your feelings and you."

He ceased. Nathalie had heard him in profound silence. Reclining back in her chair, with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes fastened on the floor, she had remained as motionless as a statue. But her color, which came and went, and the irrepressible working of her features, showed that this calmness was only apparent. Yet when she looked up, and met Monsieur de Sainville's eye with a glance as clear and steady, though not so calm as his own, and when, after a brief pause, she answered him, there was in her whole bearing a composure and feminine dignity she seldom displayed, and which were perhaps drawn forth by the presence of a stranger, not of her own sex, perhaps also by the quiet, business-like manner in which she had been addressed.

"Sir," said she, calmly, "you mean well,—kindly, I should say, and I thank you sincerely; but allow me to observe, that this advice, however excellent—that these explanations, however clear,—were both unnecessary in my case. That Madame Marceau should wish to marry her son to a lady, and that he should refuse to marry that lady, are family matters of no moment to me."

Her color deepened, and her eyes kindled with rising pride, as she concluded. Monsieur de Sainville gave her a look as searching as it was brief.

"Indeed," said he, slowly; then I confess I no longer understand in what relation you stand towards my nephew."

"In none whatever," she replied, with laconic haughtiness. "Monsieur Marceau's attentions were never encouraged by me; yet he presumed so far as to write to me, asking for a favorable reply."

"Did you give him any reply?" quietly asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"No! sir," sharply answered Nathalie; "but desirous, I suppose, of exacting an answer, Monsieur Marceau found means of entering the garden of the school. I was requesting him to retire, when Mademoiselle Dantin came up."

Monsieur de Sainville's calm countenance assumed a peculiar expression: it was not anger, nor yet scorn, but something between both. It lasted for a moment only; it had vanished when he raised his look towards Nathalie, and said, somewhat briefly:

"And this was all."

He spoke more as if announcing a fact than as if putting a question. But Nathalie felt that her silence might be construed into assent; she hesitated, and looked embarrassed, conscious of his fixed and scrutinizing gaze.

"Sir," she said at length, "I do not wish to leave you under a false impression: in one sense this is not all, for I met Monsieur Marceau in the garden of this house, this morning, by chance."

"By chance!" incredulously echoed Monsieur de Saniville.

"By chance on my part, at least," she warmly replied.

Monsieur de Sainville eyed her quietly, whilst a subdued smile, which annoyed Nathalie more than his supposed insinuation, played for a moment around his severe mouth.

"I assure you," said he, "that I never meant to hint any thing likely to wound your delicacy; but that this meeting was accidental I cannot believe. I regret that even here you should not have been free from annoyance. I shall see," he added with a slight frown, "that it occurs not again."

"I believe," observed Nathalie, with some hesitation, "that Monsieur Marceau wished to apologize."

Monsieur de Sainville smiled again.

"Permit me to doubt," said he quietly, "that your acceptance of an apology was the only result he hoped from this interview."

"Which had no other result, sir," rejoined Nathalie in a quick, nettled tone.

"Nor did I imply that it had," he calmly answered.

Still Nathalie felt anxious to explain.

"It had not even that result, having lasted only a few minutes. Indeed, Monsieur Marceau left me in a fit of pique, because," she added, coloring, as she felt this explanation had been unsolicited, and was perhaps unneeded, "because, in short, I did not sympathize with that which I really could not understand."

Monsieur de Sainville stroked his chin, and looked down.

"I regret," said he, after a pause, "having labored under an impression which has evidently been disagreeable to you; but the truth is, I plainly understood that the only obstacle to my nephew's attachment rested with his mother."

Indignant amazement kept Nathalie silent for a few seconds, during which her color deepened, until it covered her features with a burning glow.

"He said so—he dared to say so!" she passionately exclaimed; but tears of anger and shame rose to her eyes, her lips trembled, and she could say no more.

Monsieur de Sainville waited for several minutes, during which he allowed Nathalie's excitement to subside, and watched her attentively.

"I should regret this frankness," he said at length, "did I not feel you have a right to know the truth."

He spoke with emphasis. Nathalie turned towards him, looking, as she felt,—touched, and grateful.

"You have been kind, sir," said she, with that spontaneousness which is so well expressed by the untranslatable French word *effusion*, "very kind; I thank you truly."

"Are you quite sure of that?" said he eyeing her composedly; "because, he continued, answering her quick, startled look, "your countenance is more frank than you imagine; its meaning, if I read it rightly a while ago, was that the spirit of my observations was far from being acceptable to you. Now I assure you that I was not actuated by the indiscreet wish of ascertaining any thing you might think fit to conceal, but by the simple desire of doing you justice; for, indeed," he continued, after a brief pause, "I may say that the manner in which you listened to the explanations I then thought myself justified in offering, had already convinced me of that which your words have confirmed; namely, that my nephew had mistaken his own hopes for your acquiescence."

There was something in this speech that jarred on Nathalie's ear. She fancied, in her sensitive pride, that Monsieur de Sainville was too much pleased at there being no tie between his nephew and herself. Desirous of showing him that she was quite as ready and anxious as he could be to repudiate the idea, she said, somewhat proudly:

"May I ask, sir, if Madame Marceau labors under this impression?"

"It shall be my care to undeceive her," he briefly replied.

"But, sir," continued Nathalie, "I begin to feel doubts as to the propriety of accepting even your kind offer."

"Why so?" he composedly inquired.

"I feel as if my presence here could scarcely be agreeable."

"And pray how can this be?" he asked, with a smile.

"Madame Marceau will perhaps be reminded—I mean to say --indeed, I should not like to be the cause——"

She stopped short, bit her lip, and looked vexed at having begun that which it was not quite easy for her to conclude.

There was a pause, for Monsieur de Sainville took his time to observe, with that smile, half kindly, half ironical, which had already annoyed the young girl:

"I believe you allude to my nephew; but he is now precisely where it is best for him to be—in Paris, prosecuting his legal studies. If he is wise, he will remain there."

Still Nathalie seemed willing to raise some objection. Monsieur de Sainville anticipated her.

"Believe me," said he, gravely, "it shall be my care that nothing or no one annoys you under this roof."

He said not in plain speech "this is my house, and you are my guest;" but his look and manner implied it; and Nathalie felt a strange mixture of pleasure and embarrassment to think that it was so. She felt that there was kindness in that calm face, which now looked down upon her, a kindness she knew not how to acknowledge.

She was little aware that there was no need of acknowledgment; that the most finished and graceful thanks would not have been so expressive as the look, half shy, half confident, which she now turned towards Monsieur de Sainville; for the charm of the ingenuous embarrassment of youth is seldom lost on those of maturer years, nor did it seem to be lost on him, as he eyed the young girl with a sedate, thoughtful glance; and though he did not smile now, his grave features were softened and relaxed. Nathalie felt intuitively that the interview had lasted long enough, and she rose from her seat.

"I am sure, sir, that you are very kind," said she, hesitatingly, and coloring at the earnest tone, as well as at the homeliness of the compliment; "and I feel truly grateful," she added, after a pause.

Perhaps as she said this, her manner became constrained, or it may be that the last word broke the charm; for as it was uttered, Monsieur de Sainville's countenance suddenly altered back to the old expression.

"Pray let there be no undue sense of obligation," said he, with his cold politeness; and, perceiving her wish to depart, he led her out of the room.

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CHAPTER VII.

"So this is Monsieur de Sainville," thought Nathalie, as she closed the door of the library behind her and walked up stairs.

She felt disappointed; for there was nothing, as she had expected there would be, singular in her host. She also felt chilled and repelled. At first she thought this was because he had questioned her too closely. On reflection she perceived that he had put only one question to her; what she had said had been mentioned of her own accord. With haughty surprise she now asked herself why? Had his frankness been such as to win frankness in return? Nay, for he had told her exactly what he had wished to mention from the first; not one word more. He had laid facts before her, without comment without advice, without giving her any clue to his own feelings. How he felt with regard to his nephew's conduct, how he would view an engagement between Charles Marceau and herself, were matters of which she was as ignorant now as before she entered the library. She had said much, but had learned nothing save that the providential interference of which Madame Marceau had so freely taken the merit, was in reality attributable to her brother, a gentleman serious in aspect, in manner calm, if not cold. She wondered if he was always so, and if this was all. The Canoness and her niece were both in the drawing-room, when she entered it, and both looked at her with evident curiosity. She silently sat down by the arm-chair of the elder lady.

"You see, aunt," observed Madame Marceau, with an assumed gayety, that did not in Nathalie's opinion become her quite so well as the airs *de grande dame* she so often took; "you see that Mademoiselle Montolieu has come back to us safe and not looking scared."

"Oh! no; not yet," shortly answered the Canoness.

"Which implies that she will be so one day. What is Mademoiselle Montolieu's own opinion?"

She bent an inquiring glance on the young girl as she spoke; but Nathalie was not inexpert in the little feminine manœuvre of eluding a question: she replied, with a smile: "Mademoiselle Dantin never could scare me, madame, from which I conclude I am invulnerable."

No more was said on the subject.

When dinner-time came, it was Nathalie who helped the Canoness down stairs: for though she never confessed it, Aunt Radegonde was somewhat infirm.

Monsieur de Sainville was already in the dining-room; he had not seen his aunt that day, and as she entered leaning on Nathalie's arm, he came up to her and kissed the little hand. still white and delicate, which she extended towards him; she received this courtesy with cool dignity, merely observing:

"You had bad weather for your ride home, Armand."

"It was rather wet," he coolly replied.

"Rather wet!" thought Nathalie, who could hear the rain still pouring down in torrents.

"And a little windy," he added as a keen blast rushed up the avenue and swept round the old château, dying away with a moaning sound.

"I wonder what he considers really wet and windy weather," inwardly pursued Nathalie, who had all the asperity of a chilly southern against the dreary north.

"But it was not too wet for poor André to go," dryly observed Aunt Radegonde, as her nephew led her to the table.

"Oh! he is gone then!" said he quietly.

"Yes, and I think it a great pity," she observed, drawing herself up very decisively.

Monsieur de Sainville made no reply.

"A great pity for his family," said the Canoness, with slight hesitation. "Did you speak, Armand?" she added after a pause.

"No aunt, but I agree with you: it is a pity."

"He is hard," thought Nathalie, half indignantly.

The meal was formal and silent. Monsieur de Sainville spoke little; Madame Marceau seemed enveloped in her own dignity; the Canoness was mute. But when dessert was brought up and the servants had retired, she turned towards her nephew, near whom she sat, suddenly observing:

"Armand, why did you dismiss that poor André?"

"For neglect of my orders, aunt."

"Because, you see," she continued, in a half apologetic tone, as if willing to explain her abrupt inquiry, "I know the man to be so sober, honest, and industrious; at least, I think so," she added, gradually shrinking, like many an advocate, from the cause of her protégé.

"You are quite right, aunt," quietly said Monsieur de Sainville, "André is all that."

"Then, why dismiss him?" asked the Canoness once more, quite confident.

"For neglect of my orders, aunt," he answered, exactly in the same tone as before.

"I understand," sagaciously said Aunt Radegonde, "it was something very important."

"Only a tree he neglected to fell," carelessly replied her nephew.

"You dismiss him for that!"

"Not for the order neglected, aunt, but for having neglected the order."

"Why not tell him again?"

"Because I never keep servants to whom I must repeat the same order twice. I waited three days to see whether he would or not do as I had told him, and waited uselessly. I paid him about double what I owed him to get rid of him at once. He will easily find another situation; I have done him no wrong."

"Ay," said Radegonde in a low tone, "that is how people have servants who never love them, Armand."

Monsieur de Sainville was reclining back in his chair with folded arms. He looked down at his aunt and smiled a little ironically.

"Aunt," said he, "we pay servants to serve, and not to love us; and they serve us, not for love, but for wages. There is no obligation on either side; it is a contract, a bargain—no more. As for explanations between master and servant, they will not do; the servant would only learn to argue, a right he has given up, instead of obeying; the master, in speaking to the hireling, would forget the man; in short, we should have the contemptible and odious characters of rebel and tyrant face to face; one of which characters seldom exists, indeed, unless in presence of the other."

"Come," thought Nathalie, "a few more such conversations, and I think I shall begin to understand you."

But as she looked up, she met the keen look of Monsieur de Sainville, opposite whom she sat. She remembered what he had told her, concerning the frankness of her face, and with some trepidation, she resolved to be more on her guard for the future.

Madame Marceau now opened her lips in sententious speech.

"Authority, my dear aunt," said she, addressing the Canoness, "cannot be thus cast away. The power to rule is the test of mind. But few, very few," she emphatically added, "possess that lofty power."

No one replied; dinner was over. Monsieur de Sainville retired to the library; the ladies went up to the drawing-room.

Seated on her low seat, for the place by Aunt Radegonde now seemed hers, with her work lying neglected on her lap, her look fastened on the burning embers, Nathalie was lulled into a reverie, by the mingled sound of wind and rain. She was soon roused by the Canoness, who asked whether she played or sang, and eagerly requested her to sing something, when with a smile she replied that she could do both. Madame Marceau declared she would be charmed to hear her; she spoke as if Nathalie could neither touch the instrument, nor open her lips, without her majestic encouragement.

Nathalie rose, and silently seated herself before the piano her fingers wandered awhile over the keys, as she played the prelude to a gay romance: but something in the murmurs of this chill evening awoke the memory of old times; the strain changed suddenly, and she sang an old sailor's hymn to the Virgin, which she had often heard and sung in her native province. The human voice is the most spiritual expression of music, that poetry of sense, and never does it rise so much above what is earthly, as when giving utterance to religious melody: the voice of Nathalie was not of the highest quality or extent, but it was clear, flexible, and expressive; especially on this evening, when the memory of early youth, and home, was with her as she sang. Aunt Radegonde was all attention, with her head thoughtfully inclined on one side, and her knitting at rest.

"Well," said she, when the strain had ceased, "I should not have thought you sang religious music."

"What sort of music did you think then I sang?" promptly asked Nathalie.

"Something like yourself,—pretty and gay."

"And frivolous," added Nathalie in a nettled tone. She looked up as she spoke from the instrument, and in the large mirror behind it she perceived the figure of Monsieur de Sainville, whose entrance she had not heard. He was standing near his aunt, and appeared to have been listening.

"Pray sing us something else," said the Canoness.

"We shall be happy to hear Mademoiselle Montolieu again," observed Madame Marceau, with stately grace.

Nathalie hesitated. She wondered whether Monsieur de Sainville was a judge of music, and whether he would join his entreaties to those of his aunt and sister; but he remained silent, and to all appearance uninterested. After some more hesitation, the young girl complied with Aunt Radegonde's request; she sang an Italian piece, and though her voice was at first slightly tremulous, she felt that she sang it well.

"My dear child," emphatically said the Canoness, "you are a little prodigy."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu sings charmingly," observed Madame Marceau.

Her brother said nothing, and as Nathalie left the instrument to resume her seat, he began to walk slowly up and down the room; an exercise that appeared to be customary to him.

To all appearance the young girl was absorbed by her work, but in truth her thoughts were very differently engaged. She felt extremely nettled, in spite of herself, at her host's indifference.

" How morose he must be, not to like music," she thought, without acknowledging to herself, that it was his want of admiration for her music, that vexed her; "and Italian music too! But how indeed could it touch a northern icicle like him?"

Monsieur de Sainville stopped short as she came to this indignant conclusion, with a sort of coincidence to her thought that somewhat startled her; he said briefly:

"Do you not come from the south, Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

Nathalie assented.

"I thought so. I was once on the Mediterranean in a storm, and all the sailors sang that hymn you sang just now. I had never heard it since then."

He walked up to the end of the room, and as he came back once more, he again addressed her:

" May I inquire from what part of the south you come?"

" From Arles, in Provence."

"Arles!" said the Canoness, catching the word; "Arles," she repeated. " Chère Petite, what is Arles so very celebrated for?"

Nathalie knew, but did not care to say.

" Antiquities, I believe," observed Madame Marceau.

" No, it is not antiquities," decisively said the Canoness; " Petite, you smile, I am sure you know."

" We have so many good things at Arles," replied Nathalie, coloring as she caught Monsieur de Sainville's look eyeing her keenly; " excellent ham, for instance."

" Petite, I am sure it is not ham."

" Arles is celebrated for the beauty of its women," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville; " they are held to be beyond doubt the handsomest women of France."

He had paused for a moment, and resumed his walk as he concluded.

" There," cried the Canoness, with great triumph, " I knew Arles was celebrated for something remarkable. Armand, do tell us what these handsome women are like."

She looked shrewdly at Nathalie, who, conscious perhaps that she was no unfair specimen of Arlesian beauty, blushed deeply and bent over her work. But there was no need to blush

"Beauty must be seen and felt,—not described," coldly said Monsieur de Sainville.

Aunt Radegonde looked disappointed; Nathalie felt slighted, and thought her host a very disagreeable man; Madame Marceau, sitting in lonely majesty on a couch facing her, allowed her lip to curl with a haughty smile. Of all this, Monsieur de Sainville seemed to heed nothing. In passing by the table he had perceived and immediately taken up a card lying upon it. He read the name, and looked at his sister very fixedly. Nathalie had seen that card in the course of the day, and been struck to perceive that the name engraved upon it was that of Madame Marceau de Sainville, as if the owner repudiated, as much as in her power lay, the plebeian alliance, and, despite of custom, claimed back the patrician name of her birth. She now watched her brother with breathless, though stealthy attention, as he stood with the card in his hand. He laid it down silently; she looked triumphant.

"Rosalie," he abruptly asked, "was not your husband related to the celebrated republican General Marceau?"

"There was a very distant relationship," replied she, much disturbed.

"I congratulate you," he briefly said; "our military annals hold not a name more stainless or more noble; for he, the champion of modern freedom, the man of to-day, had yet inherited the soul of the past, the spirit of truth and old chivalric honor. Years ago, passing by Coblentz, I saw the pyramid beneath which he then lay, not far from the spot where he fell in his glorious youth. Why have they removed him? Those are trophies we should ever leave to the soil of the foe."*

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* Byron who loved true heroism, has bestowed a noble eulogy on the memory of the heroic Marceau.

By Coblentz, on a rise of gentle ground,
  There is a small and simple pyramid,
Crowning the summit of the verdant mound;
  Beneath its base are heroes' ashes hid,
Our enemy's—but let that not forbid
  Honor to Marceau! o'er whose early tomb
Tears, big tears, gush'd from the rough soldier's lid,
  Lamenting and yet envying such a doom,
Falling for France, whose rights he battled to resume.

Brief, brave, and glorious was his young career,
  His mourners were two hosts, his friends and foes;

As he spoke thus, a flush crossed his pale brow, and for a moment his calm look kindled.

There was an awkward attempt on the part of Madame Marceau to look interested and sympathetic, but in spite of all her efforts her brow was overcast, and Nathalie could see her biting her lip, like one striving in vain against some bitter disappointment. Her brother retired early, and she left soon after him.

As Nathalie was dressing herself on the following morning, she chanced to open the upper drawer of the ebony cabinet; scarcely had she done so when her eye fell on a letter lying within it. Her first impulse was to draw back, her next to return to the drawer, take up the letter, read the superscription, examine the seal, and, after keeping it some time in her hand, to replace it exactly where she had found it. She then closed the drawer, and without thinking of her unbraided hair, which fell down loosely on her shoulders, she stood motionless, with her eyes on the floor, her chin resting on the palm of her hand.—her whole attitude expressive of deep thought.

This meditative mood was interrupted by the entrance of Amanda, who made her appearance with an apologetic curtsey and her usual inquisitorial look. "Madame had sent her to see whether she could not assist mademoiselle in her toilet." Nathalie coldly declined.

But timidity was not one of Amanda's faults. "She felt convinced that she could do something with mademoiselle's fine hair She officiously brought a chair forward as she spoke; Nathalie looked displeased, but suddenly altering her mind, she seated herself. Amanda's white hands were immediately busy with her dark tresses.

"How delightful!" she enthusiastically exclaimed; "it is so long since I had such an opportunity of exercising my talents. Madame Marceau is the best of mistresses, but she will let me do nothing with her head; whereas Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson made me dress and undress her hair five

And fitly may the stranger, lingering here,
  Pray for his gallant spirit's bright repose;
For he was freedom's champion, one of those,
  The few in number, who had not o'erstepped
The charter to chastise, which she bestows
  On such as wield her weapons; he had kept
The whiteness of his soul, and thus men o'er him wept.
Childe Harold, st. 46, 47, Canto III.

or six times a day. It was such good practice, and gave me such lightness of touch. Does mademoiselle keep her pomatum in the upper drawer of that cabinet?"

"There is nothing in that upper drawer for which I have the least value," drily replied Nathalie.

"Well, as I was saying," composedly resumed Amanda, "a woman without hair is like a man without a moustache,—nothing. Twice did that fatal point, the want of a moustache in the opposite party, prevent me from marrying very advantageously. Now, though Monsieur Charles is so handsome,—and having lived in the *fleur des pois* of the French noblesse, I ought to know something about handsome men,—he had not my approbation until he allowed his moustache to grow; but, as I was saying, madame's son is as good as he is handsome, and yet he has a fault;—yes, the greatest fault man can have.

She paused. Nathalie said nothing.

"No man can have a greater fault," decisively continued Amanda.

Still Nathalie remained silent.

"Well, as I was saying," resumed Amanda, who had always been saying something she wished to say; "it is incomprehensible; at his age,—at any age. I do not understand women-haters. Some would say he refuses to marry a charming lady, young, rich, and handsome, on account of some previous attachment, but those who have a little experience of the world know that previous attachments are not so strong as all that; there must be woman-hating in the case. Now, though other people may have been disappointed in love, and may feel bitter, and so forth, and never even look civilly at a woman, which they might do if they are too grand to talk,—though as to talking, people quite as grand have done it; now, as I say, that is no reason why young men, who cannot be supposed to have gone through the same disappointments, should take up those shocking principles, and act up to them, and make their mothers unhappy, and cause charming young ladies to be well-nigh broken-hearted,—all because they are women-haters! If there was, indeed, a previous attachment in the case,——will mademoiselle look at herself now?" added Amanda, breaking off suddenly.

Nathalie rose, looking at herself in the glass, and frankly acknowledged Amanda's skill.

"You are a real artist," she said; "the back hair is brought forward in a most original manner."

"It is,—it is," enthusiastically cried Amanda, with a kindling glance; "Mademoiselle has the eye of a master. That *tour* is my own creation. 'Amanda,' said Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson to me, rising, one afternoon, 'I go, in three days, to the Russian Ambassador's ball; all Europe will be there. I must have something novel. Remember that I have spared your feelings; I have not appealed, even on urgent occasions, to the most illustrious professors; but, entre nous, my child, your style is monotonous; I fear you are worn out. Unless you produce some brilliant composition, I shall be compelled to consign you to the ordinary duties of the toilet, and submit to the vulgar prejudice which gives up the head of woman to the clumsy hands of man.' Let mademoiselle imagine my feelings! I spent two days in the library, looking over books and engravings; but I could neither invent nor borrow. I went to bed in despair; my reputation was lost. At length an inspiration came; I saw this admirable tour, rose and went to madame's room. Though greatly fatigued from having danced all night, she rose with angelic sweetness. The effect was so admirable, that madame embraced me, and presented me with this ring on the spot. Ah! if mademoiselle would only be kind enough to accept of my services occasionally?"

"Provided you do not meddle with my upper drawer," quietly replied Nathalie.

Amanda smiled demurely. When Nathalie looked in the evening the letter had vanished. It was then on its way to Paris, inclosed in an ill-spelt but well worded billet, addressed by Mademoiselle Amanda to Monsieur Charles, and in which that lady assured him Mademoiselle Montolieu's indifference was only too apparent. A little P. S. likewise informed Monsieur Charles that Mademoiselle Amanda, actuated by the most disinterested zeal in his cause, had undertaken to dress Mademoiselle Montolieu's hair for the express purpose of disposing her heart more in favor of Monsieur Charles.

The morning passed quietly. Nathalie sate in the drawing-room with the Canoness and Madame Marceau; the former was voluble as usual; her niece looked unwell, and complained of a sharp pain in her side. Towards noon the sound of carriage-wheels was heard in the avenue. Nathalie detected the hasty look of annoyance Madame Marceau directed towards her.

"Who is it?" asked Aunt Radegonde.

"The De Jussacs, I suppose. Mademoiselle Montolieu, I hope you are not going to leave the room."

This was uttered in as faint a tone of entreaty as politeness permitted.

"Oh! no," coolly answered Nathalie, "but I feel too warm here."

She looked flushed as she rose and retired to one of the window-recesses. The visitors entered; the young girl's look was not once raised from her embroidery, but she felt, if she did not see, that Madame Marceau had placed herself so as to keep her in the shade. This was scarcely needed, for the long drapery of the crimson curtains shrouded her completely from view. The drawing-room was large; Madame de Jussac and her daughters sat with their hostess at the other end of the apartment; their conversation reached Nathalie in broken sentences; she cared not for it; she had laid by her work, her glance was bent on the avenue below, but she saw it not, for her pride, always watchful, was now roused and indignant. She looked round; no one heeded her; she left the apartment unperceived. The garden looked so warm and sunny from the landing window, that instead of going up to her own room, as she first thought to do, she went down stairs.

The symmetrical gardens loved in the olden time, though now so long out of fashion, have still a rare charm of their own. The airy marble balustrade and graceful stone vases filled with fresh flowers, the broad flight of stately steps, the smooth gravel walks, trim hedges, green grass-plots and variegated parterres, statues of fawns and laughing nymphs, and gay fountains sparkling in the sun, have all the cheerfulness and genial warmth of the pleasant south. Here there is verdure without damp, and spreading shade without treacherous mists or winding alleys of melancholy gloom. The whole aspect of the place is light, joyous and sunny; it speaks of azure skies, of shelter from the fervid sun of noon, and pleasant walks on the clear moonlight; of those days when lovely Italy from the greatest had become the most pleasant land in all Christendom; when gallant cavaliers and fair dames met for revel and pastime in every gay villa, and wiled the hours away with dance and song, or, resting 'neath the shade within the sound and freshness of falling waters, heard and told many a tale of love and old romance.

The pleasant aspect of the garden of Sainville on this autumn morning, the verdure of all around, the blue serenity of the sky, the sunny warmth of the hour, charmed Nathalie, whose mind had all the elasticity of her years. She had never seen a spot like this in Provence, and yet by a train of subtle associations it did remind her of Provence and of old familiar things. This was enough to soothe her ruffled mood; she lightly walked along the sunny path,—now loitering near a poor statue in its sequestered niche, where it had grown green with the gathered damp of many winters,—now looking at the fountain with its sparkling *jet d'eau*,—now pausing to admire a group of pale and bending china asters, or to watch a proud peacock perched on the top of a marble column rising in the centre of a grass-plot, and on which it stood like some enchanted bird of rare plumage, until, by approaching, the young girl broke the spell, and opening its wings it flew away with a discordant scream.

It was some time before Nathalie reached the end of the first terrace. She was descending one of the flights of steps that led to the second, when she heard the sound of a footstep in the gravel walk behind her. Without reflecting why she did so, she hastily stepped into the sanctuary of the sleeping nymph. The sound drew nearer; an erect figure descended the flight of steps; it was Monsieur de Sainville. A row of yews and evergreens screened Nathalie from observation; her dark dress could scarcely be discerned through the gloomy foliage of the trees near which she stood, but she could see whilst thus unseen, and she bent eagerly forward as Monsieur de Sainville passed close to her retreat. He looked exactly as on their first interview: calm, grave, and thoughtful. In stooping to see him better she made a slight noise; he paused and threw a quick, penetrating look towards the spot where she stood: but the glance lasted only a second; his look was once more bent on the earth as with folded arms and thoughtful mien he passed on.

Nathalie breathed more freely. She had felt confident of being discovered, and had no wish for a lonely meeting with her severe-looking host. When after some time she left her retreat, she therefore entered the grounds instead of proceeding to the river side; but she was not fortunate, for the first path she took brought her in presence of Monsieur de Sainville, who was slowly walking along in the same direction. She looked shy and embarrassed; he greeted her with his calm and self-possessed courtesy.

"Do you like the recess where you were a while ago?" he suddenly asked after some desultory conversation.

"Yes, very much," hesitatingly answered Nathalie. "So he knew I was there," she thought, wondering whether he also knew she had been examining him so closely.

"Few like it," he continued; "indeed, it does not agree with the cheerful character of all around. The ivy and yews give the place a dark and melancholy aspect."

Nathalie did not answer, and Monsieur de Sainville spoke no more. They walked along in silence, and soon reached a fine lime-tree avenue, which extended from one of the wings of the château into the grounds. As they entered it Nathalie felt relieved to perceive Madame Marceau and the Canoness seated on a wooden bench which stood within the cool shadow of the largest tree. The younger lady eyed Nathalie with a sort of haughty surprise.

"My dear Armand," said she, addressing her brother with stately concern, "you have missed seeing Madame de Jussac and her daughters; did you not see the carriage?"

"I heard it," was the laconic reply.

"I assure you they were quite disappointed."

Monsieur de Sainville looked supremely indifferent.

"They are such charming girls," continued Madame Marceau; "perfect specimens of Norman beauty—Adèle especially."

She looked at Nathalie, but addressed her brother.

"Yes, she is good looking," he answered.

"Good looking!" repeated Madame Marceau, looking vexed; "I think she is by far the prettiest girl I have ever seen."

Monsieur de Sainville smiled one of his peculiar smiles.

"I have no wish," he coldly said, "to depreciate Mademoiselle de Jussac's attractions, of which, indeed, I am no fair judge, not happening to admire blue eyes or golden hair."

"But you admired them once, Armand," replied his sister, with a short irritated laugh.

Monsieur de Sainville eyed her for a moment with a sort of calm sternness that assorted well with the unmoved yet severe expression habitual to his countenance. Though the look lasted for a second only, Madame Marceau had not yet recovered from the evident trepidation into which it threw her, when her brother resumed, in his usual tone:

"Beauty is of little worth; Mademoiselle de Jussac possesses woman's greatest charm in a gentle, submissive disposition."

"And *that* is woman's greatest charm, is it?" thought Nathalie, a little nettled.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Madame Marceau, in a patronizing tone, "why did you leave the drawing-room so precipitately? Are you timid?"

"Not at all, madame," dryly replied Nathalie; "nor gentle," she longed to add, as she detected a half smile on Monsieur de Sainville's countenance, but the temptation was prudently checked.

"Will you not sit down, Petite?" here observed the Canoness. "Amanda said she saw you going into the garden, and I caused this stool to be brought for you."

She spoke as if she felt the slight the young girl had received, and wished to atone for it. Nathalie silently seated herself by her side. Monsieur de Sainville declined his sister's offer of a seat on the bench.

"I prefer this," said he, walking up and down the avenue.

"I think you prefer any thing to remaining quiet," impatiently thought Nathalie, whom this monotonous promenade annoyed considerably.

"Petite," continued the Canoness, seeing the conversation languish, "will you read us something from the last number of the Revue?"

Nathalie assented, and took the volume.

"What shall I read?" she asked. "Here is a tale entitled Mystère."

"Let us hear Mystère, by all means, said the Canoness, with great alacrity, "and mind you do not read too loud on my account.

Nathalie hesitated to begin; she was wondering whether it was Monsieur de Sainville's intention to listen.

"We are quite ready," majestically said Madame Marceau, nodding to the young girl, who sate on her low stool, with the book on her lap, one hand keeping it open, whilst the other supported her inclined brow.

Nathalie smiled a little disdainfully at finding her hesitation thus interpreted, but she complied, and began.

The story was mysterious enough in feeling, for in incident nothing could be more clear. It professed to relate the fate and sorrows of a handsome and modest girl, madly in love with a profligate sharper, and clinging to him still, in spite of his unworthiness. The only impropriety in the tale was in the subject, but it annoyed Nathalie to be reading it aloud. When she came to the most impassioned passages, she skipped freely; likewise, whenever Monsieur de Sainville drew near, she read faster, and slightly lowered her voice, to raise it again when he had gone by. This she did several times. At length he suddenly paused in his walk, to say, in his cold, polite way:

"Pray, mademoiselle, do not raise your voice on my account. I hear distinctly when I am farthest, and when you read in your lowest key."

Nathalie colored, as she perceived her little feminine manœuvre thus detected. To add to her embarrassment, Aunt Radegonde observed, with evident wonder:

"What a strange author, Petite; I never heard such abrupt transitions."

"Nor I," briefly said her nephew, in a tone that convinced Nathalie he knew very well by whose agency the abrupt transitions had been effected.

At length, and to her great satisfaction, the story concluded with an impassioned letter, of which she did not venture to omit one word, addressed by the tender-hearted heroine to her fascinating sharper.

"A romantic story, is it not, Mademoiselle Montolieu?" carelessly observed Madame Marceau, who had been half-reclining in an attitude of total indifference all the time.

"I think it unnatural, madame," replied Nathalie, closing the book.

"Oh! you do? How so?"

Nathalie hesitated to reply. She felt that the under-current of Madame Marceau's bland manner was sharp and irritating. She looked unwell. Was it pain rendered her thus, or something relative to Monsieur de Sainville, or perhaps even to herself?

"How so?" again said Madame Marceau, as if determined to make her answer.

"Is it not unnatural, madame," answered Nathalie, "that a woman, represented as pure and good, should care for that worthless man?"

"Oh! that is only romantic," answered Madame Marceau, with a cold smile; "and romantic girls are capable of any folly. Do not color up so, my dear child; you are not at all romantic, I am sure. What struck me as most improbable," she sententiously added, "was, that two such persons, standing at the extremities of the social scale, should meet. But, though you do not of course think so, novels are so false, Mademoiselle Montolieu. I know you will support me there, Armand," she added, turning towards her brother, who now stood near them; "you are no friend of romance."

Nathalie, who felt greatly offended at the unwarranted insinuations Madame Marceau chose to throw out, prepared herself to be still more offended at Monsieur de Sainville's reply.

"If by romance you mean the illusions of youth," he quietly answered, "it is not because I have outlived their day, that I quarrel with them."

Madame Marceau looked annoyed.

"My dear Armand," she exclaimed, with a short laugh, "I beg your pardon; I thought you were a professed skeptic."

"The character of skeptic," said he, very coldly, "is not one I respect, or to which I lay claim."

"Oh! then I have been mistaken all along," resumed his sister; "I thought—but no matter;—is there any harm, Armand, in asking you in what you still believe?"

"In two things, without which this world, evil as it is, would be much worse,—in God and honor."

He spoke gravely, and looked displeased.

"And in nothing else?" ironically inquired Madame Marceau.

Perhaps he did not hear her—perhaps he thought this catechising had been carried far enough; he did not, at least, reply; and Nathalie could see Aunt Radegonde looking uneasily at her niece.

"Well," resumed Madame Marceau, somewhat bitterly, "I suppose we agree on one point at least, Armand,—novels are unreal."

The slight shade of displeasure had completely passed away from Monsieur de Sainville's brow, when he replied—

"Their reality is not that of the every-day world, Rosalie, and why should it be? Their task is to deceive,—let them only deceive us well. When real novels are by chance written, who reads them? Youth lays them down with all the scorn of its fervent faith, and age, unless when grown cynical, has had enough of truth. Fictions are revelations not of truth, for they are most unreal, but of that which the soul longs to be true; they are mirrors not of actual human experience, but of human dreams and aspirations, of the eternal, though most unavailing desires of the heart."

"At that rate, that foolish Mystère was too real."

"Real," echoed Monsieur de Sainville, "I think, like Mademoiselle Montolieu, that it was a false, unnatural story. What pure woman could love that vulgar sharper? Either he is a better man, or she is a worse woman, than we find here represented; either he, with all his vices, has something originally noble, or she, with all her seeming virtue, is corrupt at heart. There is no surer test of a woman's character than the man she prefers."

"I thought caprice was the great guide."

"Not if there is judgment."

"But if there is not judgment," pertinaciously resumed Madame Marceau.

"Then, of course, the character is imperfect and hopeless."

Nathalie thought that he spoke as if weary of the discussion.

"Yes, but where there is judgment," slowly and emphatically said Madame Marceau, "how calm, passionless, and almost godlike is the character;—with what magnificent indifference does it stand aloof, and survey every thing external."

"Is this irony or flattery?" thought Nathalie, looking up, and wondering how Monsieur de Sainville would receive this speech, and the "calm, passionless, godlike," &c. He was standing near the bench on which his sister sat, but his unmoved countenance gave no clue to his feelings.

"Those minds are the minds," pursued Madame Marceau; "with them no undue feeling can exist,—reason reigns supreme."

"What has reason to reign over, if there is no undue feeling to subdue?" coldly asked her brother.

"Passionless characters are worthless in good or in evil: their gentleness is inability to feel anger; their virtue inability to do wrong. They know not how to hate, because they know not how to love. If there has been no temptation, there can be no merit; if there has been no struggle, there can be no victory."

Nathalie gave him a quick scrutinizing glance, but it was instantly detected by his look, and there was something in that cold and somewhat haughty gaze which completely baffled her scrutiny. She was more successful with Madame Marceau, who vainly endeavored to look unconcerned.

"I am afraid you are not well, Rosalie," said her brother, addressing her in a low altered tone, after eyeing her for a few moments, "a walk would do you good."

Madame Marceau hesitated, but at length rose, and accepted her brother's offer.

"Will you not accompany us over the grounds, Mademoiselle Montolieu?" he asked, turning towards Nathalie.

Madame Marceau looked haughty and displeased. Nathalie declined, under the plea of remaining with the Canoness.

"No," decisively said Aunt Radegonde, "you have not seen the grounds yet, and you must see them; but, before you go, you will perhaps arrange my shawl about me. Petite," she hurriedly whispered, as Nathalie rose, and wrapped her up in a vast shawl, "never refuse any little civility Armand may offer you; cold as he looks, he can be the best friend in the world. They are waiting; go."

"Why, what sort of a pasha is this host of mine, that so commonplace an act of politeness is construed into a high favor," thought Nathalie, as she slowly followed Monsieur de Sainville and his sister. But his quiet, unassuming manner was by no means that of one who has conferred a favor. Nathalie had leisure to contrast it with that of Madame Marceau, who, as if anxious to impress the young girl with the fact, that she and her brother could agree as well as jar, now expatiated, in her lofty way, on divers subjects, all skilfully chosen, as Nathalie thought, so as to draw forth no contradiction. But this was not destined to be a fortunate day with Madame Marceau.

It was not long before they reached a part of the grounds where several men were engaged in clearing away a group of trees, which had been found to injure, instead of improving the prospect. Several trees lay felled on the grass; a few dark yews and a sickly-looking poplar alone remained standing.

"The yews are to remain," said Monsieur de Sainville, addressing the chief of the workmen, who had approached to receive his orders; "but that poplar looks unsightly; I ordered André to fell it several days ago."

"Yes, sir, but Monsieur Charles said it was to stay."

"What!" incredulously exclaimed Monsieur de Sainville.

"Monsieur Charles told him it was to stay, sir," repeated the man, raising his voice.

There was a brief silence. Nathalie could see a slight frown contract Monsieur de Sainville's brow, and Madame Marceau turning pale as she beheld it.

"You will fell the poplar-tree, to-morrow," quietly resumed her brother, and he walked on.

The silence that followed seemed uncomfortable to all. Nathalie lingered behind. Madame Marceau gave her a hasty look, and, probably thinking she was out of hearing, addressed her brother in a low tone:

"I hope, Armand, the imprudence of Charles——"

"We will not mention it," he interrupted; "let him not act so again."

"I am sure André must have misunderstood him."

"I agree with you, that André misunderstood him; and as he committed a mistake, not a fault, he shall be welcome to return, if he chooses."

"I am sure he will be quite grateful," said Madame Marceau, biting her nether lip.

"Why so! for having been unjustly treated, and abruptly dismissed. The fact is, André never suspected he was disobeying me; he concluded no one would give such an order unauthorized by me—I concluded no one would presume to do so."

Madame Marceau made no answer, and the silence was not broken, until Monsieur de Sainville turned towards Nathalie, and observed:

"May I ask your opinion on a matter that occupies me just now?"

Nathalie came up with a half-startled look.

"It is only a gardening question," said he, smiling.

"I am lamentably ignorant of gardening, sir," she hurriedly answered; "I shall utter some solecism."

"And the courage of being mistaken with a good grace is not the courage of your age; but experience will teach you some day to utter a genuine, honest blunder, with suitable unconcern. In the mean while, pray let me have your opinion. Shall this grassy plot remain as it is, or shall we enliven it with a few flowers?"

"I should pronounce in favor of the flowers, sir."

"Why so?"

"They are so beautiful."

"But of a frivolous, transient beauty. Yet your suggestion shall be adopted. Taste must have its feminine element, and I have been giving these grounds too dark and severe an aspect. What is the matter, Rosalie?" said he, addressing his sister, who, after listening to him with evident irritation, and frequently applying the vinaigrette, was now turning away with indignant majesty.

"I feel unwell, Armand," said she, coldly.

"Then let us go in, and take aunt *en passant*."

Madame Marceau retired to her room for the rest of the day. When her brother came down to the drawing-room in the evening, Nathalie felt much piqued at the mixture of politeness and indifference with which he treated her presence. "Did he mean to awe her? He might find himself mistaken!" But alas! it was only too apparent that to awe her or produce any effect upon her was the last of Monsieur de Sainville's thoughts. Half out of curiosity, half out of pique, she ventured to differ from him once or twice, just to see how he would take it. He took it very well indeed—smiled—seemed a little surprised, and a little amused—heard her politely, but without giving her arguments great weight—and treated her, in short, with the good-humored forbearance which a man of his years and experience might be expected to display towards a young and somewhat presumptuous girl. In vain she looked cold, dignified and displeased. Monsieur de Sainville would not notice her vexation or acknowledge her claims, but persisted in treating her with the most provoking and gentlemanlike courtesy.

"Petite," said the Canoness, when he was gone, "how hot you look! Is the room close?"

Nathalie gave her a searching glance, but there was no mistaking the innocent simplicity of her look. More than she said, she evidently did not mean.

"Yes," answered Nathalie, "the room is very close."

The lamp was still unlit when she went up to her room, but a ray of light from the opposite turret fell on the polished oak floor. The young girl looked out—the light came from Monsieur de Sainville's window, and she could see him pacing his room up and down in a regular and monotonous promenade.

"He seems restless enough, for one so quiet-looking," thought Nathalie, as she stood by her window, watching him before she allowed the curtain which she held back with her hand to drop once more; "but impenetrable and mysterious as he chooses to appear, it shall go hard if I do not learn to read and understand him yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

"MADEMOISELLE Montolieu, how demure you look to-day," said a soft, bland voice behind Nathalie, as she stood on the following morning working in the embrasure of the drawing-room window. A fair hand, sparkling with jewels, was lightly laid on her shoulder. Nathalie turned round, and beheld Madame Marceau. Her cheek had a hectic tinge, deepened by the reflection from the crimson curtain near which she stood; her eyes were feverish and restless, her lips parched and dry; but she smiled down very graciously on the young girl, whose passive hand she took within her own. "You are not privileged to be grave, like me," she continued; "you see, my child, I have not always met those in whose honor and strong sense I could trust. I must sometimes misunderstand motives and actions; but I have been speaking to Armand this morning: he has made clear that which seemed obscure—there is no misunderstanding now." She spoke significantly, and pressed her hand.

Nathalie did not answer. The lady eyed her keenly.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, drawing herself up with melancholy dignity, "certain positions are dearly bought. Others can be unwell—can heed their sufferings; we belong not to ourselves; we must act a part; but we are human—the reaction inevitably follows."

"And I fear you were very ill yesterday," said Nathalie.

"Ill!" sharply echoed the lady; "no, I was only nervous; my health is excellent. Aunt," she added, turning towards the Canoness, "have you been telling Mademoiselle Montolieu that I am ill?"

"I, Rosalie! no: but Armand said yesterday evening he would send Doctor Laurent to you."

"He is too kind—I am quite well," said her niece, whilst a forced smile parted her pale lips.

Aunt Radegonde, laying down her knitting, began a grave lecture on the danger of neglect; but Madame Marceau angrily exclaimed,

"I tell you I am not ill, aunt."

The Canoness coughed dubiously, but held her peace.

A week passed away. Monsieur de Sainville was away at Marmont; his sister dropped her patronizing tone, and treated her young guest with much politeness and consideration. Nathalie was beginning, however, to feel a touch of *ennui* at the stately routine of her new existence, when one morning she unexpectedly learned that her sister had returned. She resolved to call upon her immediately; but she had promised to join the Canoness in the drawing-room, and, in passing by, she entered it to excuse herself.

Neither Aunt Radegonde nor Madame Marceau occupied their usual seats; but the room was not lonely, for, standing with his back towards her, Nathalie perceived Monsieur de Sainville. She had not so much as suspected his return from Marmont. Her first impulse was to retire; but he looked up, saw her in one of the large mirrors, and turned round composedly. Though he could scarcely repress a smile as he detected her look of annoyance, he greeted her with his accustomed politeness. Nathalie looked cold and reserved, and remained standing near the door.

"I am fortunate in meeting you thus," said he, quietly "for I very much wished to speak to you."

Nathalie came forward half-hesitatingly. He wanted her to be seated, but she declined, "she preferred standing." She did not look shy, but proud, and, though she knew it not, half-offended. Her whole bearing said, "I do not intend this interview to last very long."

"I believe you are going out," said Monsieur de Sainville, "and I do not wish to detain you. I have only one question to ask: may I hope you will do me the favor of answering it? You have been about a week in Sainville: do you like your sojourn here?"

Nathalie had not anticipated this question. She hesitated, sought for a proper reply, and found none so suitable as the plain one, "very much, sir."

He looked pleased.

"I am gratified to hear you say so, in that frank way, for to say the truth, I feared that at your age, and with the tastes natural to youth, this house must prove very dull. Do you think," he added, after a pause, "you would like to dwell here for some length of time?"

Nathalie looked embarrassed.

"I believe I should," she at length replied;—"but—"

"I am not asking you to bind yourself to any thing," interrupted Monsieur de Sainville; "indeed, the latter question was perhaps premature ; but I am happy to learn Sainville is not disagreeable to you."

With this the conversation ended. Nathalie left the room wondering what Monsieur de Sainville meant, and so much occupied with this thought that she wholly forgot her intended apology to the Canoness, and even passed by Mademoiselle Dantin's door without remembering that she had once lived there.

The town of Sainville was irregularly built on a declivity ; its steep, narrow, and ill-paved streets overhung with high, projecting houses, most of them built of wood, rendered it one of the most picturesque and gloomy little places in all Normandy. It had been an abbey town before the first French revolution, and a sort of perpetual twilight and monastic silence shrouded it still. A few dull shops scarcely relieved the monotony of the well-like streets, with their gaunt old houses rising in dark outlines against the bright blue sky. When Nathalie had first come from her gay sunny Provence to this gloomy town of the north, she had candidly wondered at the human beings who, without any seeming necessity, could resign themselves to inhabit this misanthropic-looking spot. Even now, accustomed to it as she had grown, she found, after leaving the light and airy old château, that the very houses along which she passed had an air of greater dreariness and *ennui* than ever.

Madame Lavigne, the aunt of Rose, resided at the other extremity of the town, in a retired little court, or rather alley, lying within the deep shadow and sanctified gloom of the old abbey. Gray, vast, and imposing, it rose facing a row of narrow houses, on the other side of the pathway, which had been used as a passage to a side-door of the edifice, in former times, when the abbey was in its pride, and devout pilgrims thronged Sainville at the yearly and gorgeous festivals of its patron saint. But a neighboring railroad had reduced the little town to complete insignificance ; the faithful had fallen off in zeal and numbers ; the side entrance had long been closed up, dust gathered through years, and carved stone ornaments fallen from a neighboring and half-ruined tower, lay heaped up against the wooden door ; the long grass grew freely on the worn out, but now untrodden threshold, and between the damp flags of the lonely court. Rooks had made their nests in the ruined tower, where they cawed all day long, whilst gray swallows skimmed about at twilight, and twittered beneath the eaves of the low-walled and abandoned cloisters. A wild pear-tree, growing in the neglected grounds within, overhung the low roof and narrow court in which it shed its pale blossoms every spring, and russet leaves every autumn; beneath it, in a sheltering angle of the building, stood a small stone cross and well; the gift to the town of some pious burgher, of that age of faith when an idea of sanctity seems to have been linked with clear and flowing waters. The well-worn steps attested it had once been greatly frequented, but none, save the inhabitants of the court, came to it now; another fountain twice as large, profusely gilt and bronzed, with a gay nymph instead of the lowly and faithful cross, stood in the neighboring thoroughfare. Little heeding the changes of human caprice or creed, clear and sparkling as ever, the pure water flowed on, and fell into its little stone basin with a low cheerful murmur, like a bountiful soul that gives freely still, in spite of all the neglect and ingratitude of man.

It was opposite this fountain that the house of Madame Lavigne stood. Nathalie gave a low knock at the door; it opened ere long, and an elderly, morose-looking female appeared on the threshold. Without uttering a word, or opening the door an inch wider than strict necessity required, she admitted Nathalie, closed and bolted the door, pointed up a dark spiral staircase, and entering a low kitchen, in which there seemed to reign a sort of dull twilight, she resumed her culinary avocations. Nathalie ascended the staircase, paused on the first-floor landing, and, opening a door before her, entered without knocking.

The apartment in which she found herself was wide and extremely low; it was one of those unhealthy *entresols* now met with only in old-fashioned houses; it was scrupulously clean, but every thing, from the antiquated furniture of dark walnut-tree wood, the dingy looking-glass over the mantel-shelf, and the low ceiling, down to the cold bees-waxed floor, had an air of gloom and discomfort. A doubtful and yellow light seemed to penetrate slowly through the narrow and discolored panes of a solitary window, but it won no reflection back from the dark surface of surrounding objects; heavy curtains of sombre hue, which fell from the ceiling to the floor in long folds, added to the austere and meditative gloom of the place. Partly shrouded by the dark folds of one of those curtains, and seated within the narrow circle of light which came from the window, appeared a quiet female figure: pale, thin, and motionless, she bent over her work in subdued harmony with all around her.

She did not raise her head, or turn round on hearing Nathalie but laid down her work, carefully put it by, and rose so slowly that she had not yet left her place, when the young girl stood by her side. This was Rose Montolieu, the sister of Nathalie.

It would have been difficult to find two beings more different than the two sisters as they now stood together, in the dull light of the narrow window, and exchanged a quiet greeting Dark-haired, dark-eyed, with a figure rounded, though graceful and slender, with the soft bloom of health upon her cheeks, and the clear light of youth in her eyes, Nathalie looked as gay and sunny a vision as any to which her own native Provence ever gave birth. Not all the chill and gloom of the cold room could mar that fresh and poetic beauty: the warmth and brightness of the southern sun were around her still.

But the mournful austerity of the northern home in which her lonely youth had been spent, had fallen early on Rose Montolieu. She had worked and sewed as a child in the dull light of that window, and in that dreary-looking room; the court below, the bubbling fountain, the ancient abbey, and the half-ruined tower had daily met her view for years, and for years the farthest wall of the cloister and an old church-yard which it inclosed, but where none were buried now, had bounded her narrow horizon. Unless on Sundays and holy days, when she heard mass and vespers in the abbey church, Rose seldom or ever went out. Traces of this sedentary life were impressed on her whole appearance. She was not ugly, nor was she handsome, for either would have been striking, and she looked pale and colorless like a flower reared in the shade. She was tall, rather thin, and she stooped habitually; her figure would have been good but for its total want of grace; her features were regular, but sallow and deficient in character or marked expression. The brow indeed told of intelligence, and the mouth, closed and quiet, of reserve; but the general outlines were pale and dim. Flaxen-colored hair and light blue eyes added to the sickliness of her appearance. This effect was increased by the best point in her face, teeth of dazzling whiteness and purity, but which only added to the wanness of her whole aspect, when her pale lips parted in a faint smile of rare occurrence. She looked upwards of thirty, though she was in reality a few years younger. Never was the name of Rose bestowed on one whose pallid look was more likely to suggest a painful contrast to the bloom and beauty it implies.

She took Nathalie's extended hand, stooped to imprint a kiss on her forehead, then sat down again and resumed her work. Nathalie took off her bonnet and scarf, seated herself by her sister's side, and was the first to speak.

"Well, Rose, how are you?" she asked, in her gay, cheerful tones.

"Very well," slowly answered Rose, and the grave melancholy cadence of her low voice contrasted as strikingly with that of her sister as did her personal appearance. She worked in silence for a few minutes, then looked up and said, "I saw Mademoiselle Dantin yesterday."

"But you do not judge me from her account?" very quickly returned Nathalie.

"No, I shall judge you from your own."

Rose laid down her work, and looked up as she spoke thus. This was a trying moment for Nathalie. She respected her sister more than she loved her,—she knew so little of her, and she felt so differently. She complied nevertheless with the desire of Rose, and related to her all that had happened before and since her departure from Mademoiselle Dantin's school.

"I suppose it could not be helped," thoughtfully said her sister when she had concluded. "How do you like your present position?"

"Very much indeed, Rose; it is a pleasant change to live in that fine old château, with its quaint garden and pleasant grounds; to be mistress of my time, and not to be teased by tiresome Mademoiselle Dantin."

Rose glanced at the limited horizon beyond her narrow window, then at the room so dark and dreary, and finally at her handsome sister.

"Yes," she said, in her low tone, "that place must suit your fancy well; but how do you like your hosts?"

"They are kind, though a little peculiar; the Canoness is simple and charming; she calls me Petite, though I could make two of her. Her niece, the grand lady, was proud and patronizing at first, but has much improved since she understands that I have no ambitious designs on the heir of the Sainville race. There is also a certain impertinent and yet artistic femme-de-chambre—in short, all is wonderfully different from the next-door house."

"And Monsieur de Sainville?"

"I have seen little of him."

"But what do you think of him?"

"I do not think of him at all."

She spoke coldly. Rose eyed her with slow surprise.

"What do you think of his nephew?" she resumed.

"That he is handsome, cool, and confident," replied Nathalie, smiling.

"You think him handsome?"

"Yes, indeed! And you look wonderfully alarmed, Rose."

"Do you love him?" asked Rose, almost quickly.

"Love him!" echoed Nathalie, much offended.

"I mean, do you think you will like him some day?"

"Really I cannot tell."

"You make me feel anxious," said Rose, nervously laying down her work; "you are so heedless, and that young man seems to me so unprincipled. Were his intentions ever honorable?"

"He dared not have had any other; he dared not, Rose,' cried Nathalie, almost angrily; her look kindled, and her cheek flushed in a moment.

"You defend him."

"I defend myself, Rose!"

Rose fixed her mild, earnest glance on that gay, handsome face, over which still lingered the flush of wounded pride.

"I will not advise you," she said, "for you do not follow advice; but I have seen that Charles Marceau. Handsome as he is, I like him not. I like not his eye nor his look. Oh! Nathalie, to the woman he loves, that man, so young in years, so old in aspect, will bring nothing but sorrow, and to the woman who loves him nothing but tenfold woe. Besides, that family is so proud! Oh! sister, do not love him; do not, even were he an angel of light."

"And he is more like an angel of darkness. Come, Rose, do not look grave. I am here, he is in Paris; and as I happen to be as proud as all the Marceaus and the De Sainvilles, I promise you that, even were he an angel of light, this dangerous Charles Marceau shall be nought to me."

Rose looked more easy. There was a pause.

"Do you like Monsieur de Sainville?" she resumed, abstractedly.

"What matter, Rose, whether I do or not? it will not trouble him much."

"Do you like him?"

Nathalie colored, hesitated. "No," she at length resolutely replied.

"And why not?" gravely asked her sister.

"Because I do not like him."

"But I want to know why."

"Well then because he is disagreeable and proud."

"Do you mean ill-tempered?"

"No, he rules his temper, as he rules every thing,—with the iron hand, in the velvet glove."

"Then what do you dislike him for?"

"Dislike is a strong word. I care not for him. He may be harsh and proud; it is nought to me."

"Harsh and proud! this argues little with the noble story of his youth."

"And pray," asked Nathalie, smiling somewhat ironically, "what do you see so very noble in the character of one who devotes the best part of existence to the ambitious task of winning back a lost wealth and position, and who, whilst paying his father's debts, does not lose the opportunity of making a very handsome fortune?"

"Have you lost your old admiration for the heroic, or is this mere perversity?" asked Rose, a little indignantly. "Monsieur de Sainville is only too good to think about you."

"Which is not at all, Rose; take my word for it."

"I see," quietly said Rose, "he has hurt your pride, or rather your vanity. Foolish girl! Do you know he took the trouble to call on Mademoiselle Dantin and explain this matter to her? She told me herself, and confessed she had been much too hasty. At the same time she said you were the most fiery and vindictive little thing she had ever met with."

"Which amiable character she no doubt gave to Monsieur de Sainville," observed Nathalie, coloring and looking vexed. "I am very much obliged to him for calling on my greatest enemy, and fishing out my faults from her."

"Fishing out your faults," said Rose compassionately; "child, what interest can a man of his years and experience take in the faults, or good points, of a girl of eighteen?"

"Very well," replied Nathalie, evidently nettled, "the girl of eighteen cares little for either his years or experience; that is one comfort."

"Early this morning," continued Rose, "Désirée told me a gentleman wanted me below. I came down; it was Monsieur de Sainville, sitting where you are sitting now."

Nathalie remained mute. Her sister resumed:

"He came to me, as your only relative, to apologize and explain. I told him I feared your sojourn at the château would excite some attention, upon which, though not without much hesitation, he suggested that you should remain as his aunt's companion. Still I objected, but when he asked if your sudden disappearance from the town of Sainville would not give rise to more disagreeable conjectures, I could not but confess it; and you unfortunately know too well that I have no home to offer you. You must stay there a few months at least."

Nathalie looked very thoughtful.

"Rose," she said at length, "I retract; he is kind to me at least. You called me perverse. Oh! if you only knew how I long sometimes to yield reverence and homage. But enough of this: how is your aunt?"

"Irrecoverably blind, and she knows it. She is coming down."

Nathalie did not say how little she desired to meet Madame Lavigne. She rose, turned towards the window, and leaning her brow against the glass pane, looked out. The brightness of the blue noonday sky beyond, seemed to render the court more dark and dull than usual, yet a streak of sunshine from behind the old abbey, gleamed through the thin foliage of the pear-tree, whilst its light shadow waved to and fro over the little fountain. Nathalie thought of the warm old garden of Sainville, and the thought made both court and fountain look more cold and chill than ever. She glanced at her sister. Rose was bending once more over her task, silent and motionless. "And this," thought Nathalie, "is her home, her life; and were she to live another century, I verily believe she would be found in that same place; the patient slave of that old tyrant."

The door opened, and Madame Lavigne entered, supported by Désirée, who, near her mistress, looked gentle and benignant.

It was not age, though she was old, that gave so harsh and repulsive a look to the aunt of Rose. The low brow needed not the furrows of years to be stern and forbidding; and wrinkles could scarcely add to the sour expression of the mouth, with its downward and contemptuous curve: notwithstanding the dulness of the sightless eyes, the expression of the whole face was acute and shrewd; but it was the shrewdness of cunning, not of intellect. On seeing her enter, Rose got up, drew a large arm-chair forward, and helped her to be seated.

"Do not handle me," snappishly exclaimed Madame Lavigne; "you know I cannot endure it."

Rose withdrew in silence.

"You might give me the pillow whilst you were about it," said her aunt, in the same ill-tempered tone; "but that is like you—officious and doing nothing."

Rose took a pillow from a chair, shook it, and placed it behind her aunt, who only waved her impatiently away.

"Enough," she briefly said, "I hate fondling; I know what it means. Désirée," she added in a soft civil tone, as the patient Rose returned to her seat, and resumed her work, "is my chop ready?"

"Not yet," was the reply, more laconic than respectful.

"I shall be glad of it, when it is ready; not that I mean to hurry you, but I shall be glad of it."

"Of course," returned Désirée, with a disdainful toss of the head; but she did not go, or seem in any hurry. She loitered about the place, wiped away a few particles of dust from the furniture with her apron, opened the window, closed it again, and at length condescended to leave the room. Nathalie turned round to resume her seat: in an instant the features of the blind woman were alive with a strange expression of mingled anger and alarm:

"Who is that? You have got some one with you, Rose. Who is that?"

Nathalie laughed gayly.

"Oh! merry little Nathalie, who is always laughing, and always makes one laugh," said Madame Lavigne, with an attempt to smile graciously; "where is she?"

"Here," replied Nathalie, rising, and approaching her.

"Ay, here she is," continued the blind woman, stretching out her hand towards the young girl; "here she is, with that cheerful voice, which does one good to hear. Oh! dear child, if you were my niece, you would amuse me in my old age, without interested motives. But there is one comfort," she added after a pause, "I have only an annuity which dies with me; let those think the contrary who will."

Nathalie glanced at her sister, but if Rose had been as devoid of hearing as her aunt was of sight, she could not have remained more unmoved.

"I suppose," thought Nathalie, "poor Rose is accustomed to it."

"Well," said the blind woman, in a slightly impatient tone, though it was conciliatory still, "how will my merry little Nathalie amuse her poor old friend to-day? Will she sing one of the funny Provençal songs, or take off that cross Mademoiselle Dantin? Oh! I forget that she is at the château now,—companion, governess, what is it? Then I suppose it is that odd Monsieur de Sainville she will take off; come, let us hear."

She assumed a listening attitude; but Nathalie briefly replied:

"Monsieur de Sainville is not at all odd; and as he happens to be my best friend now, I shall not take him off."

She turned to move away, but the blind woman held her fast.

"So he is your best friend," she said, with a peculiar smile. "Ah! Well, girls of eighteen might choose older men for their best friends."

Nathalie colored, but did not deign to reply.

"And is that best friend of yours very kind?" continued Madame Lavigne.

"Very kind."

"True: best friends of thirty-five or forty—that is his age, is it not?—are always kind, especially——"

"Madame Lavigne," interrupted Nathalie, "you will please not to talk so. I will not hear it."

The blind woman laughed—a short, sour laugh.

"Little spitfire, that is how you used to go on with poor Mademoiselle Dantin; that is how you will go on with the best friend ere long. Heaven help him, poor man! Oh! you need not tap your foot so impatiently, I know I am teazing you; but, child, you are nothing unless you are teazed: I know, when I could see, you never looked half so pretty as at those times. Ah! I dare say you are smiling now; but you need not, you foolish child; the beauty of southern women never lasts: they are old at twenty-five. Now, if you were like Rose," she added, after a pause, "pale, ugly——"

"Rose is not ugly," angrily interrupted Nathalie; "she is pale; but if she had only exercise and fresh air, she would be quite blooming. She has what an aunt of hers never had,—nice, gentle features. Of me you may say what you like; but I warn you I will not hear a word against Rose, who has enough to endure from your tyranny."

She spoke hotly, and her eyes sparkled, half with anger, half with tears. The ill-tempered spite of Madame Lavigne against poor Rose, though familiar to her, always inspired her with the same indignant surprise; for to a generous heart, injustice, however old, seems ever new.

The vehement reproaches of the young girl, uttered in a rapid tone, which rendered her southern accent more apparent, only drew a sarcastic smile from the blind woman.

"So, I am a tyrant," she said, as if rather flattered by the imputation. "I am; I know it: from a child I would have my way. Rose can leave me if she likes, and she remains——"

"Because she is too good," roundly interrupted Nathalie.

"Oh! she is, is she? Well, talking of the best friend has put you out of temper. Sing me one of the Basque songs, whilst waiting for that chop, which I think Désirée will never bring."

Pity for Madame Lavigne's infirmity, and the desire of lessening the weary burden Rose had to bear, generally induced Nathalie to endure with good-humored patience the covert irony concealed under the blind woman's kindness; but on this day, instead of complying with the request of Madame Lavigne, whose side she had left, she turned her flushed face towards the window, and remained obstinately silent.

"So we are offended," said Madame Lavigne, after waiting awhile; "we do not like allusions to the best friend. Ah! well——"

The entrance of Désirée, bringing in the long expected chop, checked what she was going to add. Rose took the tray from the servant, placed it on a small table, cut the meat, arranged every thing, and, having brought the table near to her aunt's chair, resumed her own seat in silence.

Madame Lavigne ate a few morsels, and frowned.

"It is not done enough," said she, crossly.

This remark having elicited no corresponding observation, she added, in a sharper tone:

"Did you hear, Rose? My chop is not done enough."

"Will you have another, aunt?"

"Another, when meat is at the price it is! Another chop! Is the girl mad?"

"Then what is to be done, aunt?"

"Time to ask, indeed! What is to be done? You might say what should have been done?"

Rose made no reply.

Madame Lavigne ate a few morsels more, then laid down her plate indignantly.

"You have the worst heart in the world," she exclaimed. with a sort of snarl; "here I keep telling you that my chop is not done enough, which implies that I shall feel miserable for the whole day, and you never so much as say you are sorry for it. Did I adopt and rear you up at my own expense for this, you ungrateful thing? To punish you, I shall not touch a morsel more; I shall not eat another bit to-day. There, take the plate away; and ring the bell."

Rose complied. The sour-faced Désirée made her appearance.

"Well," said she sharply, "what am I rung up for? I warn you," she added, turning towards her mistress, "I am not going to trot up and down at your pleasure. What do you want?"

"There, do not be cross," soothingly said Madame Lavigne; "but you see, Désirée, the chop was very good,—very good indeed, only not quite done."

"Not done enough?" indignantly echoed the servant "You dare tell me I do not know how to cook a chop—a mutton chop! Then depend upon it that is the last chop I shall cook for you."

"My dear Désirée!"

"And we shall see how matters will go on when I am away. How much more candle will be burned in the week; how much more wood it will take to fill the cellar; with oil for the lamp, and money for every thing. Go your ways; another shall cook your chops soon; ay, and help to eat them too."

"Désirée!" exclaimed Madame Lavigne, utterly distressed at this lamentable picture of household ruin, "you must not go. I cannot afford to let you go. You are the most honest creature breathing; I could trust you with every cupboard in the house."

"Every cupboard!" ironically ejaculated Désirée, "as if there was what would fatten a mouse in any of your cupboards."

"Give me the chop," submissively said Madame Lavigne; "I will eat it."

"Eat it! Do not; it would poison you. Ah! well, my chops will not trouble you long."

Madame Lavigne wrung her hands.

"Rose! Nathalie, my dear child!" she exclaimed, "do somebody give me that chop; I want it; I have not had my dinner. There," she added, with a sigh, as Rose complied, and she ate hastily what was on the plate; "there, I am sure you cannot complain of me, Désirée."

But Désirée was not mollified. People might eat her chops, or not eat them—she did not care. Thank heaven, she was independent, and need not be any one's servant. She might sit with her arms folded all day long, if she liked; ay, and have a house of her own, too. In vain Madame Lavigne apologized, coaxed, and entreated; Désirée was not to be moved, and after once more recapitulating her wrongs, and dwelling with scornful emphasis on the fact of the chop not being done enough, she left the room, with a sneer at the waste and ruin to be perpetrated by the blind woman's future servant.

The lamentations of Madame Lavigne were loud and deep. She hated that old Désirée, she did; but she could not do without her.

"You see what your cruel want of sympathy has done, Rose," she exclaimed, throwing, as usual, all the blame on her patient niece. "You are the cause of it all. That old Désirée is as sour as vinegar, but I could trust her with untold gold. Go down to her directly; she has a stupid sort of liking for you: and you may tell her, too, that I shall make her a present one of these days."

Rose left her seat. Nathalie, who now stood ready to depart, followed her sister out of the room; she felt too indignant to address Madame Lavigne with even common civility.

"Wait for me here," said Rose, pausing in the passage, and entering the dark kitchen, where Désirée had retired to brood over her wrongs.

Rose addressed the servant. Nathalie could not hear what her sister said, for she spoke in a low tone, and stood turned away from her; but she heard Désirée's reply.

"Stay, Mamzelle Rose! Not I. She shall have another servant soon, and one who will rob her, I hope."

Still Rose urged something, which did not reach Nathalie's ear.

"And why should I stay," sharply asked Désirée, "to please that selfish old creature?"

"She has had much to try her," said Rose, gently; "her husband beat and ill-used her."

"Served her right," muttered Désirée.

"The son whom she loved robbed and deserted her; and now she is a blind, infirm, and aged woman."

"And is that a reason why she should torment every one around her, and make a martyr of you? I am more than a match for her; but you—so patient, so enduring! It has often made my blood boil to see how she used you; and, believe me, I have avenged you many a time; but that is over now."

"Then you will go," said Rose.

"Why should I stay? she hates me in her heart, and you are so quiet, that you will not miss me much."

"And so," continued Rose, "the face that has been a familiar one for so many years, shall be replaced by that of a stranger."

Désirée peered wistfully into her face.

"Will you miss me, then, when I am gone?" she asked, "will you miss the cross old woman, who never had a kind word for you, nor for any body else?"

"I shall miss you, Désirée," was the low reply.

"Then you do care for me, after all; quiet as you are, you do care for me. Ah! Mamzelle Rose, how can this be?"

"Because, God help me, I have had few or none to love," exclaimed Rose, in a tone of deep and involuntary sadness. "Will you stay?" she added, after a pause.

Désirée looked at her; then turned away abruptly.

"I shall see," she said, in a rough tone, and evidently wishing to close the conversation.

Rose left her without pressing the subject further; she understood Désirée, her temper, and her ways, and knew that the point was won.

"Oh! Rose, Rose," exclaimed Nathalie, as her sister stood once more by her side, "is this to live?"

"It is the will of God," replied Rose, in a low tone.

She said this very simply, without false humility or empty denial of sacrifice, but like one to whom that holy will had become the daily sanctification of existence. And as she spoke, a smile of singular sweetness broke over her pale features, whilst something of the light which illumines the martyr's glance passed in her eyes; the lingering and dearly-bought triumph of a spirit nature had made proud, and which will and faith alone had rendered meek.

Nathalie said nothing, but taking her sister's thin hand, she reverently raised it to her lips as they parted.

CHAPTER IX.

Nathalie truly loved her sister; but, from witnessing such scenes, she always entered Madame Lavigne's house with regret, and left it with relief. She now breathed more freely, as the gloomy door closed behind her; and when she reached the old château, standing on the brow of the hill, in the clear sunlight, with its airy turrets rising against the blue sky,—when she entered the broad avenue, with its stately elms, and passed beneath the majestic portico, Nathalie forgot the doubts and fears of Rose. "What matter about the future," she thought; "it is good to be here!"

She found the Canoness sitting at the end of the lime-tree avenue, and engaged in a very close conversation with Amanda. She looked pleased, though a little disconcerted, on seeing Nathalie. The discreet *femme-de-chambre* quietly retired.

"Do you feel too tired for a walk over the grounds, this lovely morning?" said Aunt Radegonde.

"I never feel tired," replied Nathalie, taking her arm, with a smile.

But the Canoness was not ready yet; there was an immense shawl to be wrapped round her person, to fall down in graceful folds, like a theatrical mantle, and sweep the alley like a train, before she could think of moving a step.

"Amanda is a nice girl," said the Canoness, as they took a narrow path, with a row of tall trees on one side, and a smoothly-shaved lawn extending far away on the other, "but she must be kept at a distance. Take an elderly woman's advice, child; never make free with servants."

"I must do like you," said Nathalie, smiling demurely.

"Exactly," answered the Canoness, with a complacent nod. "*Entre nous*, Petite, I do pique myself on the art of keeping subordinates at a distance, without *hauteur*—that would be unkind—but with that sense of dignity which is incumbent on one who may be said to be the head of the family."

Nathalie glanced down at the insignificant little figure by her side; but Aunt Radegonde was quite in earnest, and feelingly lamented the serious responsibility fate had thrown upon her.

"We are quite alone to day," resumed the Canoness, with one of her abrupt transitions. "Rosalie is gone to spend a few days with the De Jussacs. Armand is gone also," she added, after a pause.

"With Madame Marceau?" quickly said Nathalie.

"No; to Marmont. To say the truth, Petite, he does not care much about the De Jussacs; but do not say I told you so;—it is quite a secret. I feel rather tired; shall we rest awhile?"

A bench stood near them, beneath a sycamore; they sat down.

"Then we are quite alone to-day?" carelessly said Nathalie.

"Quite. Armand does not come home to dinner."

"How often you are deprived of his company; you must feel it very much."

The Canoness coughed.

"Of course, of course," she slowly replied.

"And how harassing those frequent journeys must prove to Monsieur de Sainville."

"Not at all, Petite. Armand's property is at Marmont, and he likes to superintend it himself; besides, he is rather restless."

"Restless, Marraine! and his manner is so quiet!"

"Quiet!" echoed the Canoness, shaking her head. "Ah, well!"

She closed her eyes, and pursed up her lips. Nathalie said nothing; she was looking thoughtfully at the little lake lying beneath the old cedar-tree, beyond the lawn before her.

"My dear," suddenly asked the Canoness, "did you say that Armand was quiet?"

"I only spoke of my impression."

"Ah! but it is very dangerous to have wrong impressions, especially about the tempers of people with whom we live; and though I am singularly reserved—Nature was in a reserved mood when she fashioned me, Petite—and never open my lips on family matters, I think it proper to set you right in this point. Armand is not at all quiet, my dear; he is rather——" She hesitated.

"Irritable?" suggested Nathalie.

"No; for it is most difficult to vex him."

"Passionate, perhaps?"

"He never gets into a passion; but he is not quiet. Some think him a little stern; I do not at all, of course; but being his aunt, it is not likely he would presume to show any thing of the kind with me. But the other day, when you spoke to him in the library, did you not think him rather severe, Petite?'

And the little Canoness, inclining her head on one side, looked wonderfully interested.

"Oh, no!" calmly answered Nathalie.

"Ah, well! I dare say not; indeed, my dear, if I ask, it is solely for your benefit. Take it as a rule, that reserved people, like me, are never inquisitive. Also, if I speak of Armand, it is merely to enlighten you; and though you are very reserved, I can see that you understand me."

"I fear I am very dull, madame, for I assure you I did not understand——"

"I am a little deaf to-day," quickly interrupted the Canoness, "but do not mind repeating. As I was saying, Armand's cold manner signifies nothing;—he can be very kind, very generous."

"Kindness and generosity are his characteristics, then," said Nathalie, almost involuntarily.

"Yes," hesitatingly replied the Canoness. "You see he has a very strong sense of duty, iron will, and some pride, and so——But, *à propos*, this reminds me of what I said yesterday, about not refusing any little civility Armand might offer you. I had a motive for that, as I have for every thing I say. I could see by his manner, he felt friendly towards you. I learned this morning that my penetration had not deceived me."

Nathalie looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, this morning, Armand sent me a very respectful little note, requesting the favor of an interview. I granted it, of course. He came to my boudoir and in that deferential manner, with which he always addresses me, he asked my opinion of you: 'Did I think you were happy here? Was not the place too dull for so young a girl—almost a child?' "

"A child!" exclaimed Nathalie, coloring; "why, I am eighteen."

"You only look sixteen; so it comes to the same."

"But to look younger does not take away actual years," quickly said Nathalie.

"Yes, it does," quite as quickly rejoined the Canoness. "A friend—a very particular friend of mine, looks full ten years younger than her real age; I contend that she is ten years younger."

"But that friend of yours is not old."

"She is not very young. But, Petite, take my advice, do not use the word old: it is not refined. 'An old woman!' can any thing be more odious: always say, 'elderly,'—'an elderly lady.' Well, as I was saying, Armand asked me 'if the place was not too dull for so young a girl, almost a child, and one too who seemed even more gay and thoughtless than most girls of her age.'"

"Thanks to Aunt Radegonde's reserve, I am likely to hear a very flattering account of myself," thought Nathalie, with a rising color and somewhat scornful look.

The Canoness continued. "I told him that I thought you quite happy, but that it would be best to ask you; that I had no doubt you would answer truly. 'Quite my opinion,' he replied; 'I saw from the first she was a very artless little thing.' *Chère* Petite, I was so pleased. Monsieur de Sainville likes candor above all things, and detests equivocating people. But though I had solved his doubts, he was not satisfied; I could see better than he could himself what he wished;—men do not understand those things; and so I suggested that you should stay here as my companion: he agreed, provided you consented. So, Petite, it rests with you now to say, yes or no." She looked up at the young girl with evident anxiety.

Nathalie's eyes were bent upon the earth. She raised them at last, and there was something in her look and in the smile that now parted her lips, which Aunt Radegonde, with all her penetration, could not fathom.

"You are good,—truly good," said she, in a low tone.

"Then you consent; I am so glad. Come, I feel quite rested, and as you are never tired, we will go on. Petite, you look pensive?" she added, as they resumed their walk.

"Madame——"

"How often must I tell you to call me, Marraine."

"Well, then, dear Marraine," said Nathalie, laying her hand on the arm of the Canoness;" allow me to ask if Madame Marceau knows of this?"

"Madame Marceau!" echoed the Canoness, drawing up her little figure with an air of offended dignity; "and what has my niece to do with my affairs! If instead of one companion I chose to have two,—ay, or twenty, Rosalie would not presume to interfere."

Nathalie smiled, and made an apology which immediately soothed the placable Canoness, who assured her that Madame Marceau would be quite as much pleased as herself, or Monsieur de Sainville.

"Then Monsieur de Sainville is pleased?"

"Yes, Petite; he said he did not think I should regret this plan. 'I am sure I shall not,' I replied; 'she is a good child; I saw it instantly, and my first glance never deceives me.' 'Yes,' said he, 'she has a pleasant face; and though the old schoolmistress wished me to believe her of a most violent and fiery temper, I think for my part she is only a little petulant.'"

"Only a little petulant!" echoed Nathalie, stopping short in the path with indignant amazement.

"Yes. So you see he has quite a favorable opinion of you: otherwise you may believe I should never have repeated all this."

"Indeed, I am much obliged to Monsieur de Sainville," replied Nathalie, speaking very fast. "A child, more gay and thoughtless than most girls of her age,—an artless little thing with a pleasant face, and only a little petulant! How flattering!"

"Yes, Petite, he would not speak so of every one; for he is rather hard to please."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, there is beautiful Mademoiselle de Jussac, whom he scarcely allows to be pretty. When Rosalie talks of her wit and talent, he says he cannot discover that she has much of either; he confesses, however, that she has the quality he most prizes in woman; gentleness."

"Indeed!" again said Nathalie. There was a long pause.

"Here is the green-house," said Aunt Radegonde; "are you fond of flowers, Petite?"

A sudden turning of the path brought them within view of the green-house, as she spoke. It was a light elegant rotunda, supported by pillars, and standing on a flight of circular steps in the centre of a small green lawn. A grove of firs and cypress-trees sheltered it from the northern winds; it shone amidst their dark foliage like a white Grecian temple, sacred to the worship of some solitary wood-nymph. One of the wide arched windows was open to admit to the flowers and shrubs within, the warm sun of noon and the soft breezes of the south.

"But this does not look at all like a green-house," exclaimed Nathalie, recognizing the temple-like building she had seen from her window.

"It was a ball-room formerly; and the first ball given there was opened by my aunt Mademoiselle Adelaide de Sainville, when I was quite a child. *Chère* Petite, it was very beautiful! The trees around were all hung with lamps, and within, the hall was lit so brilliantly, that it looked here like a blaze of light. The orchestra, hidden in a recess of foliage, played the sweetest music imaginable; whilst lovely ladies and gallant-looking gentlemen moved along in their stately minuets, —not foolish quadrilles. And I verily believe I never saw such handsome women as I beheld that night. There was tall and handsome Mademoiselle d'Albe, with eyes brighter than her jewels, and a handsome neck she used to arch so proudly. She walked up and down the hall in an interval of the dance, with a whole bevy of gentlemen hanging about her, for she was witty as she was beautiful; poor thing! they say she walked to the guillotine with the same stately step. Then there were the three Mesdemoiselles de Moustier, all in white and lovely as angels; and Madame d'Estang, who danced so well and had the prettiest foot ever seen; and Madame de Merville, whose voice sounded like a silver bell; and many more besides: but handsome as they all were, my aunt Adelaide was the queen of the ball."

"Was she so very beautiful?"

"Beautiful! Ah! Petite, women are not what they once were. There certainly never lived a lovelier creature than my aunt. There was grace in every one of her movements, and a charm beyond every thing in her look and her smile. She was rather dark, but her eyes were so deep and soft. In short, you may judge of her beauty, Petite, by the fact that Monsieur de Sainville, though so critical, admits it. I have a portrait of her up stairs, which I will show you. Will you come in and look at the flowers?"

They entered. Flowers of varied scent and hue every where greeted their gaze. Some stood together in gayly contrasted groups; others, pale, star-like things, gleamed in solitary beauty through their dark leaves; fresh garden blossoms, exotics rare and frail, delicate heaths, dark orchidæ, of fantastic shape, and large wax-like flowers from many a far and foreign land, were gathered there. As Nathalie now slowly paced, with the little Canoness, that long-deserted ball-room, which had once echoed to the gay sounds of the dance, and heard the hum of pleasant voices, she thought of the brilliant scene Aunt Radegonde had beheld there; she thought of the long-faded beauties, as perishable and as lovely as the frail flowers she now saw, of their gay smiles and bright looks, of their short-lived pleasures, and evening triumphs still more brief.

"If it were night," said she, in a thoughtful tone, "I should feel quite timid here."

"Timid! Why so, Petite?"

"I should fancy the place haunted. Take away the blue sky, the sunlight, and the cheerful day; imagine night abroad, making all things shadowy, vast and dim; those dark cypresses rising against almost as dark a sky; the moon shedding her soft, pale light on the green sward, and stealing in through the half-open casement, just revealing enough to make you fear all that she leaves in mysterious shadow. Imagine all these things, and I assure you, aunt, those fair flowers, now so bright and gay, will become as the pale spirits of the lovely ladies you described awhile ago. Look at that fuschia, so slender and elegant, with its purple bells,—there is majesty in all its bending grace: it is handsome Mademoiselle d'Albe covered with jewels; those green and erect laurels are her suitors; the three delicate camellias, standing apart, are the three fair sisters; that lively little yellow flower, up there by itself, and still dancing to the breeze, must be the lady with the pretty foot; and the modest, retiring-looking blue-bell is as surely her of the clear, harmonious voice. As for your beautiful aunt, behold her there in that fair royal lily, the queen of all around her; how serene, how lovely she looks; and as the breeze just bends her stately head, how gracefully she seems to perform the honors of the revel!"

The Canoness looked puzzled. She glanced at the flowers, and from them to Nathalie. The young girl was standing near her in a thoughtful attitude, her head slightly averted, her cheek supported by her hand, in a way familiar to her, her look slowly wandering over the graceful flowers her fancy had for a moment conjured up into the long-vanished guests of the lonely hall. A stream of golden light from the autumn sun fell on her through the open window, and as it mellowed into a sunny brown the waves of her jet-black hair, and gave to the brilliant bloom of her cheek a rosy hue as soft and yet as warm as that with which the setting sun lights up the western sky. Aunt Radegonde thought that, to none of the bright southern flowers gathered there, did that light lend a richer warmth and more fervid radiance.

"Petite," she said, smiling, "you are very romantic. You must surely be descended from one of those old Provençal troubadours, both poets and knights, who wandered over Europe,—now jousting at tournaments, now singing at floral games, or helping fair ladies to hold and preside over courts of love."

Nathalie looked up with a merry laugh, and the clear, silvery sounds awoke in the old hall echoes to which it had long been a stranger.

"Hush!" said she mysteriously, "we must not laugh,—the place is haunted; and surely there never was a more pleasant ghost-chamber; but the perfumes of these fine ladies make one feel quite faint; shall we not go and leave them to their enchanted solitude?"

They left the place as she spoke. As they took the path that led homewards, Nathalie turned back to give one last look and see, as she said, that the flowers had not assumed their original shapes as soon as their backs were turned. But the spell which bound them—if spell there was—remained unbroken; the white temple rose silent as ever in its bower of dark northern trees, and the soft breeze of noon still brought low-whispered tidings from without to the captive beauties of the old hall.

"It was a happy idea," thoughtfully said Nathalie, "to convert that gay ball-room into a green-house;—beauties and flowers! The transition is very poetic."

"But not intentional, Petite; Armand not being romantic like you; and but for his passion for flowers——"

"Has Monsieur de Sainville a passion for flowers?" quickly asked Nathalie.

"Indeed he has; they are the only luxury in which he indulges. His room and the library are always full of flowers, and he comes here every morning to inspect the progress of his favorites."

"He called them frivolous, transient things, the other day," exclaimed Nathalie.

"Oh, did he?" said the Canoness, with a slow cough.—Nathalie began to understand that sign.—"Well, you see, Monsieur de Sainville is peculiar, and being peculiar he has peculiarities. He never says he is fond of flowers,—he never speaks of them indeed; and if he did speak of them, I dare say it would be disparagingly. I conclude he is fond of them from observation. I observe a great deal,—he may think them frivolous, valueless things, and yet like them; you understand. But we will change the subject."

She looked mysterious and uneasy, as she always did when speaking of her nephew, and the conversation was continued on ordinary topics until they reached the château. Aunt Radegonde then bade the young girl go up to her room, take off her things, and significantly advised her to trust herself to the guidance of Amanda, when she wished to join her. The femme-de-chambre looked fully as mysterious when Nathalie, having invoked her assistance, asked her whither she was leading her along those dark passages and strange-looking staircases? "She had been forbidden to tell; but mademoiselle would soon know. She paused, as she spoke, before a door, which she opened with the intimation "that this was the boudoir of Madame le Chainoinesse."

Nathalie entered, and by the octagon shape of the room, perceived it was a turret chamber, similar to her own. Small as the apartment originally was, the variety of objects it contained rendered it smaller still: yet there was no confusion, and all was tastefully arranged.

"What a *bonbonnière!*" exclaimed Nathalie, glancing around her admiringly; "a perfect jewel."

"Little flatterer," said Aunt Radegonde, reprovingly; but her face beamed with pleasure.

"I never saw such a place," continued Nathalie, still standing in the centre of the room, and examining every thing; "how beautiful and soft the light comes in through those rose-colored curtains; and that delicate paper with flowers so fresh, that they look ready to be gathered. Oh! Aunt Radegonde, there is only one explanation possible: you are a fairy, and this is your bower."

She turned as she spoke towards the Canoness, who, chilly as usual, was seated by the fire-side. With her gold cross, her handsome black dress of rich brocade donned for the occasion, her cap, and ruffles of rare old lace, her soft white hands demurely folded on her knees, and her Cinderella feet, which, to use her own phraseology, had turned so many heads in her younger days, coquettishly resting on a cushion—she looked very fairy-like indeed.

"Petite," she answered smiling, "you have childish fancies."

"You are a fairy," decisively resumed Nathalie, who saw very well this last fancy was not at all displeasing, "and I will prove it. It was a fairy needle wrought these embroidered chairs; it is a fairy's hand that daily tends those exquisi flowers in their bed of moss; a fairy brought those beautifully tinted shells from the deep sea, and enchanted that bird in its golden cage. The last crowning proof of all is, that the whole place not being larger than a good-sized nut-shell, none but a fairy could live in it."

"But you see it will hold two."

"And I dare say, it could even hold three; four it could not. Well might Amanda lead me along such tortuous staircases and mysterious passages! I suppose you throw a spell over the place, like Peri Baoou over her palace, in the old Arabian tale. Shall it sometimes be visible for me?"

"Always," was the gracious reply. "I have not often been here of late; but now I will come. You shall have a key to enter when you please."

"Delightful!" said Nathalie, gayly; "and I promise you to do as I did to-day, when, actuated by a presentiment of the truth, I attired myself in my best to pay you all proper honor."

"And you look very well, Petite," approvingly replied the Canoness, attentively eyeing the young girl, who was now seated on a low settee opposite her; "look at yourself. It must be your white dress and the pink curtains behind."

Obeying the injunction of the Canoness, Nathalie looked up; in the depths of the large mirror before her she saw a graceful figure clad in a light white robe, leaning on one elbow, and half-bending forward, with a look and attitude that became it well. She saw it with its clear brow and soft dark eyes, and her lips parted with a smile, as she slowly turned her look away. She knew that the vision which had greeted her gaze was beautiful and bright, but beautiful of its own beauty; that no toilet's meretricious art had given harmony to those graceful features, symmetry to the bending figure, and that the pure bloom of the clear cheek was not borrowed from the curtain's rosy hue. She turned towards the Canoness as if struck with a sudden thought.

"You said you would show me the portrait of your aunt."

"Look behind, on your right, child."

Nathalie turned quickly round. On either side of the window was a female portrait; that which the Canoness had designated, represented a richly attired lady of singular loveliness. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, with arched eyebrows, a clear profile, cheeks like the peach, and ripe smiling lips—she seemed the gay, handsome creature Nathalie had imagined; but though she looked at the portrait long and fixedly, she said nothing

"Do you not think it handsome?" asked the Canoness.

"Yes," slowly answered the young girl, looking at the other picture as she spoke.

This painting was greatly inferior as a work of art to the other, but it represented a young girl in all the grace and freshness of youthful beauty. Curls of thick clustering hair of that *blonde-cendre* so much esteemed in France, shaded features so exquisitely lovely, that Nathalie thought they must belong to some ideal being. The deep blue eyes, transparent complexion, and half-parted lips, displaying the pearly teeth within, rendered the whole countenance inexpressibly charming.

This time, Nathalie's admiration was fully expressed.

"What a lovely countenance!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I told you so."

"Oh! I do not mean your aunt Adelaide, but this portrait."

"Oh! this." The Canoness spoke slowly. She looked up at the picture, and shaded her eyes with her hand, as if to see it better.

"Is it a portrait, and a good likeness?" continued Nathalie.

Receiving no reply, she turned round. The little Canoness was looking at the picture in the same attitude, but her hand shook visibly, and her eyes were dim. Nathalie stood silent and astonished; gazing by stealth at the lovely face that seemed to be smiling down on her, and wondering what sad story could be linked with those serene features.

"The fire is very low," abruptly said the Canoness, as Nathalie resumed her seat; she stooped to arrange it, and though the fire burned brightly, the task took her long to accomplish. Nathalie took up a book from the table—it was the Revue—and opened at the tale "Mystère." She laid it down pettishly.

"I detest that tale!" she said. The Canoness was leaning back in her chair, grave, thoughtful, and unusually silent. She did not answer, and did not seem to have heard her. "Do you think the author means to say that mad girl will marry that bad man?" continued Nathalie, wishing to break through this awkward silence.

"Petite," said the Canoness, with sudden earnestness, "do you ever think of marriage?"

"Sometimes—not often," replied Nathalie, a little surprised.

The Canoness shook her head solemnly.

"I wish the answer had been 'Never.'"

"Is it such a dangerous thought?" asked Nathalie, laughing.

"When I make observations," said Aunt Radegonde, drawing herself up with an offended air, "I expect them to be listened to with due gravity; but no matter."

The little Canoness was not one of those whose reproaches could rouse Nathalie to defiance; far from it. She rose quickly, and, walking up to Aunt Radegonde's chair, looked, as she felt, touched and sorry.

"I did not mean to be rude,—indeed I did not," she said, very earnestly; "and you are so good," she added, in a half-arch, half-coaxing tone, "that I do not think you can be angry very long."

"Oh! Petite," replied the placable Canoness, making Nathalie sit down on the cushion at her feet, and eyeing her wistfully, as she laid her hand on her shoulder; "how is it that when I see a young girl like you, thoughtless, handsome, and happy, my heart yearns towards her at once? And if you had not laughed, I would have given you some good advice."

"To which I shall listen very attentively now," soothingly said Nathalie.

"You will not be the first that has done so," replied the Canoness, with a touch of consequence; "nor yet the first gay child that has sat thus at my feet, and looked into my face," she added, in a sad and lower tone. Her lips trembled, and again her eyes grew dim.

"And the advice?" quickly said Nathalie.

Aunt Radegonde was once more consequential and erect.

"It shall be on that point most important, most fatal to woman—marriage! But, perhaps, Petite, you may yet determine to lead a life of celibacy, like me?"

"Is it not good to be prepared for every emergency?" demurely asked Nathalie.

"True, Petite; well, then, to be methodical, we will divide that advice under three heads,—the man you wish to have, the man who wishes to have you, and the man you ought to have."

A mischievous smile played on Nathalie's features.

"Could we not blend those three characters into one?" she asked, very gravely.

"Impossible!" cried the Canoness, looking shocked at this heterodox suggestion; "why they are three wholly different individuals. The man you wish to have sees it—they always see it, and he becomes a tyrant: they always are tyrants in such cases. The man who wishes to have you is exacting, jealous, and will fret your life away. But the man you ought to have has esteem and affection for you, just as you have esteem and affection for him. You have exactly the same tastes, the same feelings; you always agree, you never quarrel—nature made you for one another."

"Marraine," very quickly said Nathalie, "I will never have him; he is good, honest, an excellent cousin, brother, or uncle, all whose offices nature has evidently destined him to fulfil, but I will never have him."

"Who, then, will you have?" asked the Canoness, very gravely.

"Why, if I must choose, one of the other two."

"But which of the two?"

"The one who likes me," replied Nathalie, after a brief pause given to reflection; "I shall rather fancy receiving incense and adoration,—being a sort of household divinity."

"Well," said Aunt Radegonde, with a sigh, "I am glad you did not at least choose the other one, for *he* is the worst of the three."

"But why is *he* the worst?" asked Nathalie, amused at the gravity with which she spoke of those imaginary characters.

"Because you like him, and he knows it. Petite, you do not know that man: he is proud, exacting, and would find fault with an angel of light. Give a woman the beauty of a goddess, the wisdom of a sage, the temper of a saint,—he will find fault with her still. If she is plain, she ought to be handsome; if she is handsome, beauty is but dross; if she is spirited, he calls her shrew; if gentle, tame; if she is prudent, he finds her cold-hearted; and giddy if she is a little gay."

"Why, what a morose, disagreeable man!" exclaimed Nathalie, very indignantly; "and yet, proud as he is," she added, after a pause, "he too could be made to stoop."

"You do not know him," said the Canoness, shaking her head: "you do not know him; how proud, how jealous, how exacting the love he receives has made him. Let us take an imaginary case,—quite imaginary, you understand."

"Yes, imaginary; but about him."

"About him and a young girl—any young girl."

"Yes, any young girl. Shall she be beautiful?"

"Very beautiful."

"As beautiful—I mean as good-looking as your Aunt Adelaide."

"More, Petite, more—she shall be the fairest creature eye ever saw, as gentle and winning as she is lovely."

"What! is she all this, and does he not love her?" impatiently exclaimed Nathalie.

" He does, Petite. Not love her ! it would not be in human nature. Stern, forbidding as he is, he shall never speak to her in the same voice in which he speaks to others ; he shall never look at her with the same look : but some are as inexorable in their love as others in their hatred, and *he*, Petite, is one of them."

She spoke in a low impressive tone, but Nathalie looked up at her smilingly.

" If she loves him, and he loves her," she said softly, " where can the mischief be?"

" Oh ! Petite," sorrowfully replied Aunt Radegonde, " you are a child, and, child-like, you think that to be young, pretty, and loving is enough."

" And why is it not enough ?" earnestly asked Nathalie.

" Because much love has made him exacting ; he will be over her as an inexorable judge that forgives nothing. '

" But where there is affection, it is so easy to forgive."

" Not for him—not for him."

" Then he is vindictive."

" No ; for he does not avenge the wrong ; but neither does he forget it."

" But what does she do to vex him? She must do something; what is it?"

" We will suppose any thing," said the Canoness, after a pause ; " for you do not forget this is quite imaginary."

" Oh ! yes,—quite imaginary."

" Well, then, we will suppose that he is called away ; she remains at home, sorrowful and pining."

I see, I see," interrupted Nathalie, in her impatient way " he is faithless ; whilst she—oh ! she would wait for him for ever. He is a very bad man. I do not like him at all," she added, with great warmth.

The Canoness looked a little disconcerted.

" No, Petite ; it is not exactly so. You see, she loves him ; but she is so gentle, so good, that she will sacrifice herself ; in short, it is an old story ; they make her promise to marry another."

" Then she does not love him !" exclaimed Nathalie.

" Yes, she does ; but she is yielding gentleness itself. Well, he returns in time to save her ; for he can save her : and though the man they would give her to is young, handsome, rich, and enamored, she would far sooner have her old love. Well, what do you think he does ?"

"He leaves her to the fate she has chosen," indignantly exclaimed Nathalie; "and he does well."

A flush rose to the brow of the Canoness; the hand, which still rested on the shoulders of the young girl was hastily withdrawn.

"You justify him," said she, eyeing her almost sternly; "you condemn her to misery!"

"Misery! No. She, who was weak to love, shall be weak to suffer; she shall marry, be unhappy for a while, and then be comforted, and forget."

"Oh! you arrange it thus, do you?" replied Aunt Radegonde, with a sad and somewhat bitter smile; "but why should it surprise me? I have always noticed it: the young are severe, and very hard. Well, then, since you understand all this so well, tell me what becomes of him."

"He suffers, but does not complain."

"Suffer! How can he suffer? Did he not reject her willingly?"

"He rejected her, because it was not the woman he wanted,—but the love of the woman. How could he care for it, once faith was gone, and her truth was broken? Do not think he feels nothing," she added, warming with her subject. "Oh! he still loves, but with the brooding, vengeful love of the wronged heart. He bitterly regrets the past, but he repents nothing; he would still cast her from him, though his own heart should break, or, worse, bleed for ever."

She spoke so earnestly, that her eyes grew dim, and her lips trembled. There was a pause.

"Petite," said the Canoness, in her usual tone, and once more laying her hand on the young girl's shoulder, whilst she eyed her thoughtfully, "you grieved me so much awhile ago, that I thought I should never forgive you,—never love you again. But now I see you spoke from ignorance; how should you know the truth? You have not lived the years I have lived, nor seen the sad things I have seen. You give to her the heartlessness of man,—to him the enduring, even though resentful love of woman. His heart break! Any man's heart break! You simple child, know that it is she who dies of grief, and he—why he lives on. But, oh! Petite, you may have your own sorrows, your own trials yet; do not be so severe."

"But all this is imaginary, is it not?" asked Nathalie, hesitatingly.

"Why, you did not think it was real, did you?" quickly asked the Canoness.

"How could I?"

"No; of course you could not."

"Well, then, since it is imaginary," said Nathalie, "what does it prove? *He*," she smiled as she emphasized the word, "*he* is the corner-stone of your edifice; remove him, the rest falls to the earth. Now, as he is unreal——"

"Petite," interrupted the Canoness, "he is not unreal."

"He is not!"

"No. Do you remember I once spoke to you of a certain person?"

"Whom you called 'that person,'" quickly rejoined Nathalie.

"He and that person are much alike; and the woman for whom that person will break his heart is not born, and will never exist."

"You think so," thoughtfully said Nathalie.

"I know it. Nay, more; I always had the presentiment no woman could or would love him; that she would have more fear than love in her heart. I am not superstitious, Petite, though I might be so, having had some extraordinary dreams and presentiments, which *never* deceived me; but in that presentiment I always believed;—ay, though he was neither fool nor coward, nor any of those things women hate by instinct, I always felt he could not win love."

"But why so?"

"Because he was too proud, too unbending, to yield us the homage nature has made ours by right," replied the Canoness, drawing up her little figure in all the majesty of feminine dignity.

Nathalie's lip curled with a haughty smile.

"What! is he so proud as that?" she said, disdainfully. "I should like to see him humbled—ay, thoroughly."

"But you never will, Petite," quickly rejoined the Canoness.

"Why not?" promptly asked Nathalie.

"In the first place, because he will not allow himself to be humbled; in the second, because he is no visitor here. You must not think, Petite," she added, smiling shrewdly at the momentary disappointment expressed by Nathalie's features. "that I should be so indiscreet as to describe, in such peculiar terms, too, a person you could recognize. No; I am very reserved; and take my word for it, you will never recognize that person' in any of our guests."

Nathalie looked up, and smiled a peculiar smile.

"I shall not try," she replied, quietly.

"No, do not; but profit by my example, and make reserve your rule of conduct. And, Petite," she earnestly added, "will you not meditate on that other advice I gave on that point most important, most fatal to woman,—marriage? Remember! divided under three heads: the man you wish to have (but as I have shown, the very last you ought to have); the man who wishes to have you; and the man,—mark, Petite,—the man you *ought* to have."

"But whom I will not have at all," quickly rejoined Nathalie. "No, indeed, I cannot," she added, very gravely, and noticing the Canoness's look of chagrin, "I give you my word I cannot. He is a good, honest sort of man,—a great deal too good for me; I know I ought to like him, *mais c'est plus fort que moi*," she added, with a very decisive wave of the hand.

The Canoness remonstrated, a little peevishly; "he was," she declared, "the only good one of the three." But Nathalie was rebellious, and would not hear of him.

The contest lasted long, and was not yet over when they were called to their early and quiet dinner. The subject being then dropped, was not resumed subsequently.

CHAPTER X.

Evening was come; the Canoness had fallen asleep in her chair by the fire-side, whilst Nathalie loitered about the room, inspecting and admiring the various treasures of petrified birds' nests, miniature boxes, fairy-looking baskets, and specimens of rare old china gathered in the little boudoir. After sleeping for about an hour, Aunt Radegonde awoke; to her dismay the fire had burned out; the room looked lonely.

"Petite, where are you?" she exclaimed, in a tone of chagrin.

The rose-colored curtains opened, and Nathalie stood smiling before her.

"I came here when you fell asleep," she replied.

"When I fell asleep!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a nettled tone. "I was not sleeping, Petite; but I do often fall into a meditative mood after dinner, and I was particularly meditative this evening. What were you doing near that cool window!" she added, as Nathalie resumed her seat.

"I was watching the wind."

"Watching the wind, Petite? How strangely you talk! The wind is invisible."

"Not so invisible but that, like most mysterious people, he betrays himself by his deeds; therefore have I been watching him whistling round the corner of this turret."

"And what did the wind say?"

"Wonderful things, no doubt, but which, not being a fairy, like you, I could not understand; but I can tell you what he did: he tossed the chimneys about, knocked down a flowerpot or two from an upper story; pleaded in a soft, pitiful voice to get in at this window, and not being admitted, moaned away along the avenue, and spitefully smashed one of the branches of those great trees."

"*Ah! mon Dieu!*" uneasily said the Canoness; "what a boisterous night! I dislike the wind; it sounds so very dreary."

"But it is nothing at all here," observed Nathalie, smiling. "I recollect an old château in Provence, something like this, but standing by the sea-side, and uninhabited, save by an old housekeeper, who let me roam about at will, for I was a child then, and something of a favorite with her. There was a long gallery—a picture gallery once, but then almost bare, and very dreary—where the wind seemed to hold his peculiar revels, and never since have I heard any thing so unearthly. I know not how it was, but the sound always seemed to come from behind me. I would walk very slowly along, listening, for sometimes his windship picked his steps as daintily as any lady, then he suddenly quickened his pace and I quickened mine as well; it seemed a race between us: we reached the door together; I darted out without even once looking behind me, and flew down stairs breathless between pleasure and fear."

"Then you were afraid?"

"Mortally afraid; and there was the charm. That gallery was to me as a ghost story whispered by the fire-side, or a Radcliff romance read with a solitary candle in a lonely bedroom. The old garden, full of poplars, was nearly as pleasant: it was delightful to stand in their deep shadow, listening to the rustling above, and when the breeze became more keen, and swept down the avenue, to feel it blowing my hair back, and scarcely allowing me to catch my breath. Oh! our Provence is a pleasant place; and how often in Mademoiselle Dantin's dull school-room have I longed to be away, to stand in that solitary avenue thick with fallen leaves, for just one short quarter of an hour, to listen to the wind and the poplars again.

"Petite," said the Canoness, bending forward, "you must not talk so; you are getting excited."

"It is the wind," gayly replied Nathalie.

"Ah!" thoughtfully observed Aunt Radegonde, "you are like my kitten, Minette, who, poor little thing, always gets frisky in windy weather."

"Am I frisky to-night?" asked Nathalie, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Very much so; and to keep you in proper order, I shall give you this knitting to finish."

Nathalie took the knitting, which seemed to produce the desired effect of subduing her spirits, for she fell ere long into a deep reverie, and the quiet prosing of Aunt Radegonde reached her ear, but went no farther. About an hour had thus elapsed when a servant came up with a message from Monsieur de Sainville, desiring to know whether his aunt would allow him to wait upon her. Nathalie, absorbed in her knitting, never stirred or looked up; the Canoness seemed slightly flurried.

"Certainly," she quickly answered; "we shall be very happy to see Monsieur de Sainville. "You see, Petite," she added, addressing Nathalie, when the servant had retired; "how deferential Armand is; I assure you he would not think of entering this room without my express permission."

Ere long a step was heard upon the stairs, the door opened, and Monsieur de Sainville entered. The table had to be removed for him to take a seat between his aunt and Nathalie; in spite of all Rose had told, the young girl remained cold and distant. But this was a fact which did not seem to produce a very painful impression upon her host; his discourse indeed was almost exclusively directed to his aunt; the subject, to Nathalie's great disdain, was the result of the crops and the state of the country; from this there was a transition to the more poetical theme of gardening.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Monsieur de Sainville, suddenly addressing Nathalie, "I caused some flowers to be put in the centre of the grassy plot, as you suggested; but they look very gay near the dark yews; they are evidently unsympathetic natures; have you seen them? What do you think of them?"

"I have seen them, sir, and do not like them at all," answered Nathalie.

"Do you think they ought to be removed?"

"Nay, sir; I think they will do to stay, and read a good lesson on the danger of taking and following the advice of the ignorant."

She spoke as demurely as a nun; never once looking towards Monsieur de Sainville to see how he would take this; but as she sat opposite Aunt Radegonde, she could meet her astonished look. There was a pause. The Canoness seemed uncomfortable.

"How very high the wind is," she observed at length, by way of opening the conversation; "do you like to listen to the wind, Armand?"

"The wind, Aunt," he musingly replied. "Why yes, I believe I had some such fancy when I was a boy."

"Ah! well, Petite likes it very much; she stood listening to it for a whole hour this evening."

"You like it?" inquiringly said Monsieur de Sainville, turning towards Nathalie.

"When I have nothing better to do, I like it well enough," she carelessly answered.

"She doats on it," continued the Canoness, without noticing Nathalie's look of vexation; for there was something peculiarly disagreeable to her in being thus made the subject of a conversation addressed to Monsieur de Sainville. "Yes, she does indeed," resumed Aunt Radegonde, too well pleased with so easy a topic of discourse to abandon it in haste. "There was an old château by the sea, somewhere in Provence, with a lonely gallery and an ancient garden, where she used to go, and listen to the wind for hours."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu is romantic," said Monsieur de Sainville, with his peculiar smile.

"Romantic! indeed she is. You should have heard her in the hot-house to-day. She transformed all the flowers into ladies.—gave them names, and described their characters."

"Decidedly romantic," continued her nephew. "Fortunately," he added, noticing, perhaps, Nathalie's look of increased annoyance, "she has not reached the age when romance becomes forbidden."

"Oh!" quickly said Nathalie, "I do not wish to avail myself of that plea. I ought to know better, of course, since I am eighteen," she added, a little hesitatingly, and yet unable to resist the temptation of letting Monsieur de Sainville become aware of this important fact. She spoke, moreover, in a tone of quiet dignity destined to inspire him with what, notwithstanding all his politeness, she greatly doubted that he felt for her—a proper degree of respect.

"Indeed!" said he, very gravely. "Eighteen! Oh! of course, that alters the matter completely. Eighteen! Why, at that age of mature reason and varied experience, the romance of life is quite over."

Nathalie colored deeply, but kept her eyes fixed on her work; to all appearance it occupied her completely.

"My dear child!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a tone of dismay, "what can you be thinking of? You are letting down your stitches as fast as you can."

"Oh, no!" quickly answered Nathalie, "it is all right."

"All right! Why, Petite, I saw you dropping the stitches. Show it to me. There, do you see," she added, as Nathalie reluctantly surrendered her work. "*Ah! mon Dieu!*" she continued, with evident consternation, "it is all wrong. Petite! Petite! where can your thoughts have been wandering for the last half-hour?"

"Nowhere, indeed," said Nathalie, very quickly; "but the mistake will soon be mended," she added; and taking the work from the hand of the Canoness, she drew the needles out, and deliberately unravelled it.

Aunt Radegonde eyed her with surprise.

The young girl's clear brow was now slightly overcast; her cheeks were flushed, her lips compressed; she looked a not unattractive picture of vexation, as she stood on the hearth, her face half-averted, her hands so zealously engaged in unraveling her previous task, that they threatened not to leave any token of her mistake.

"Take care, Petite, take care!" soothingly said the Canoness; "do not go so fast, nor allow yourself to be so easily put out; you will, I fear, meet with greater misfortunes in life than a piece of knitting going wrong. Why, what a strange girl she is," she added, as Nathalie's half-averted features lit up with an arch smile; "there she is laughing; awhile ago she looked ready to cry. It must be the wind makes her so changeable; she confessed to me it made her as frisky as my kitten, Minette." This was uttered confidentially, and addressed to Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie colored to the very temples, and looked far more vexed than before.

"Madame," she quickly cried, "You said that——"

"I did not."

"But what a very peculiar fact," observed Monsieur de Sainville, turning towards Nathalie; "does the wind indeed affect you in that strange manner, mademoiselle?"

Nathalie, who had resumed her seat, laid down her work on her lap, and looking at the speaker, said, with great gravity:

"In what strange manner, sir?"

"Does it affect your spirits, or—I speak, alas, from a practical knowledge of Minette's disposition—your temper? Pray excuse the question, but this is an interesting physiological fact."

Was this meant in earnest, or was it mere trifling? Nathalie did not know; she at all events drew herself up with an air of offended dignity, but it would not do; laughter glanced in her dark eyes, and an irrepressible smile played around the corners of her mouth—compressed in vain.

"No," she demurely replied; "the wind might have affected me so when I was a child, but of course it cannot do so now."

"Ah! of course," said Monsieur de Sainville, smiling; "both feelings and temper have become so calm, so sedate at the mature age of eighteen."

"My dear child!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a nervous tone, "do put by that knitting, or we shall have some new mishap."

The knitting was dropped as if it burned Nathalie's fingers; but scarcely was restored to Aunt Radegonde's safekeeping when the young girl exclaimed:

"What shall I do? I cannot endure to sit thus, doing nothing."

"You are industrious," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Industrious! not at all," exclaimed Nathalie, with a look and tone implying a perfect disdain for the compliment; "I cannot endure idleness, simply because it fills me with *ennui*."

"You are right, for all that," persisted Monsieur de Sainville, whom Nathalie began to suspect of a desire to teaze her, —a suspicion not wholly displeasing to her childish vanity; "depend upon it, *ennui* was the serpent who tempted Eve, even in Eden."

"Oh! Eve and the serpent," exclaimed the Canoness, catching only the last words; "ah! what a pity Eve was not more reserved."

"You would have been so," observed her nephew, smiling.

"I cannot tell," cautiously replied Aunt Radegonde; "it is imprudent to boast; yet I do think I should have been more reserved. Do you not think you would, Petite?"

Nathalie shook her head dubiously.

"Oh, yes, you would," persisted Aunt Radegonde; "do you not think she would, Armand?"

"Of course," carelessly replied Monsieur de Sainville, who had taken up the Revue, and was slowly turning over its pages.

"You have too good an opinion of me, madame," said Nathalie, addressing the Canoness somewhat coldly; "I should have acted exactly as poor Eve."

"Petite, you cannot tell."

"Yes, I can, for I have done it," was the reply, more prompt than discreet, and perchance Nathalie felt so herself, for she looked somewhat confused as the incautious admission escaped her lips.

"Oh!" said the Canoness, very much astonished.

Monsieur de Sainville laid down the book, and turning slowly on his chair, eyed Nathalie with his calm, penetrating gaze.

"You have tasted the forbidden fruit?" he said at length.

Nathalie hesitated slightly, but she answered "Yes."

"And pray—I ask to be instructed—what sort of taste had it?"

"The taste of experience, I suppose—bitterness."

"And how did you feel after it?"

"Hot and feverish."

"Petite!" interposed the Canoness, who seemed vexed at the freedom of Nathalie's self-accusations; "how can you compare a childish disobedience, for the purpose of securing some forbidden delicacy, with the great disobedience of Eve? It was forbidden knowledge she coveted, you know."

But Nathalie would not avail herself of this excuse, perhaps because she disdained to do so; perhaps, because the slight smile which curled Monsieur de Sainville's lip told her it would be unavailing.

"And so did I," she answered quickly; "for good fruit I had in plenty, and therefore did not value; but knowledge, knowledge of good and evil,—forbidden knowledge, was rare and tempting."

"Well," said Monsieur de Sainville, "you are at least frank about it; and really," he added, after a pause, "you speak as if the taste of the apple were still on your lips."

"She speaks very heedlessly," stiffly said the aunt.

"Pray," continued Monsieur de Sainville, without heeding her, "what sort of a shape did the serpent take?"

Nathalie met his keen look very quietly.

"There was no serpent," she answered, smiling, as she thought he looked slightly baffled.

"Oh! an act of your own free will," he observed, somewhat dryly; "much better still."

"No serpent! Then after all, it was not like Eve," put in the Canoness.

Nathalie did not reply.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Monsieur de Sainville, "you are really cruel. After exciting my aunt's curiosity, you stop short."

"My curiosity, Armand; my curiosity, Monsieur de Sainville!" exclaimed the Canoness, laying down her knitting with evident indignation; "well, if I pride myself on any thing, it is on not being at all inquisitive."

"I hope you are not in this instance, madame," said Nathalie, very gravely, "for the whole story is so childish, that I assure you it will not bear telling."

"Well, but what is it, Petite?" suddenly asked the Canoness, wholly forgetting that she was not inquisitive; "was it a fruit you tasted?"

"Yes, a fruit."

"And what fruit?"

"The solanum."

"Why it is a poisonous berry; did you know that?"

"Yes, I knew it."

"And yet you ate it," said the Canoness with evident surprise.

"Aunt," interposed her nephew looking up from the Revue. which he had taken up once more, "do you not see, mademoiselle ate that berry because it was poisonous, which certainly constitutes a great point of resemblance with Eve?"

Nathalie said nothing. The Canoness resumed.

"What could your motive be, Petite?"

"Mere childishness; a whim—a fancy."

"A fancy for poisonous berries?" continued Aunt Radegonde; "how very strange!"

"Oh!" hesitatingly replied Nathalie, who now seemed thoroughly annoyed with the subject, "it was not exactly because they were poisonous; but an old sailor who had travelled in the east, once described to me a fruit which grew there and which he said procured a most delightful trance. I foolishly concluded it to be the solanum, which grew in our garden,—a treacherous, luscious-looking fruit; so the next day I went——"

"And plucked it directly," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Oh! no," coldly replied Nathalie; "I took time to consider. I knew the fruit was poisonous; but then by not eating too much, I should be safe; in short," she added with a penitential sigh, "I did it."

"And what was the result?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"A week's thirst, dizziness and fever," answered Nathalie, with a half-rueful, half-comic look; "if I had only enjoyed my expected treat, I should not have cared much; but it was all suffering—no pleasure."

"But I hope you felt duly sorry," said the Canoness, very gravely.

"No; I was only disappointed."

"But, surely, Petite, you know it was very wrong."

"Wrong! why so? If I had not eaten the berries, then I should be longing for them to this day; whereas now all the berries in this world would not tempt me."

"A shrewd reasoning," remarked Monsieur de Sainville, "and one which, applied to graver matters, could not fail from introducing some new principle in ethics."

"Well, Petite," observed the Canoness, admonishingly, "you must not do so any more; do you hear?"

"Aunt," interrupted her nephew, with his peculiar smile, "you remonstrate in vain; Mademoiselle Montolieu has only had a taste of the apple, she will return to it yet."

Nathalie colored very deeply, but it was not in her nature to be dismayed. She soon rallied, and replied, looking up: "Not to that apple, at least."

"Oh! then you do contemplate tasting some other."

"Perhaps so, I cannot tell." Nathalie spoke with apparent carelessness, but in spite of her usual daring, she felt annoyed and disturbed.

"Mademoiselle," continued her pitiless host, "you have forgotten the most interesting part of your story. How old were you when you ate the berries?"

Nathalie stooped to see if the fire, which was out, wanted arranging, and made no reply. Her face was crimson when she looked up again; as she did so she met the look of Mon sieur de Sainville fastened on her with an expression that implied he still waited for her reply.

"It was some years ago," she said at length.

"I am sure she was a mere child," officiously observed the Canoness.

Monsieur de Sainville smiled.

"I suspect," he remarked, quietly, "that a mere child would not have thought of any such thing. Mademoiselle Montolieu had more probably reached the age for making experiments; thirteen or fourteen, I should say. Ah! I know it," he added, as Nathalie gave a slight start.

"Yes, it was about then," she rejoined, carelessly; but indifferent as she strove to appear, she now devoutly wished in her heart that Eve's apple and Nathalie Montolieu's berries had never been mentioned that evening.

Nathalie labored under an infirmity not uncommon to girls of buoyant spirits and little discretion or experience; she did not know that there are a thousand innocent things that a woman, especially when young, is expected not to say, under pain of being thought vain, presuming, and even immodest. But that mixture of ease, self-possession, and propriety of bearing which the world requires of youth, is not natural to it; it is not even pleasing, because it is premature; the charm of the woman sits ill on the inexperienced girl: she has her own grace, which varies according to temperament, for, after all, it is only a question of temperament,—and she who, in very lightness of heart, gives utterance to every passing thought, is not less pure in her daring than she who, in her shyness, shrinks and blushes before every look. Nathalie was certainly not more vain than most handsome girls of her age; she was not less innocent in her southern vivacity of manner and freedom of speech than the calm and reserved maidens of Normandy. At the same time, she might have subdued both, without any detriment to herself, and she probably would have done so, but for the harsh censure of Mademoiselle Dantin. The schoolmistress wished her to talk and laugh less, and broadly hinted at the impropriety of running up and down stairs with so much of the unnecessary liveliness displayed by Nathalie, who could scarcely go quietly across a room, or even move about, without seeming happier for the exertion. These ill-tempered remonstrances, joined to taunts of her southern origin, to which Mademoiselle Dantin charitably attributed her various failings, only irritated Nathalie, and strengthened her firm resolve not to be improved: provincial patriotism. and the spirit of opposition both commanded resistance, and both were duly obeyed. But this rebellious spirit did not prevent Nathalie from having a certain fear of opinion—that tyrant of youth. Mademoiselle Dantin she did not mind: she knew her to be unjust, but she shrank from being thought bold or unfeminine by others; and it was the dread of this that made her feel somewhat anxious on this particular evening.

"What had she said?" was her internal soliloquy. "Was there much harm in it? Why in a sort of pique and wilful daring had she allowed herself to be led from one confession to another, until she had uttered so much Monsieur de Sainville had no business to hear? What was it to him. the berries she ate, the experiments she made, and the conclusions she drew? He, too, drew his own conclusions. evidently; all this mad talk would give him a delightful opinion of her: she bit her lip and wished it had been her tongue. He looked rather grave; she was sure it was about her—he was thinking her a very forward impertinent girl, and regretting that she had ever become his guest. Well, as to that, he need not trouble himself—she would go soon enough; for as to staying where she could not speak her mind freely, it was not to be thought of."

This haughty decision closed the reflections of Nathalie, who, like most proud and haughty persons, always kept by her a convenient stock of little imaginary quarrels. She now perceived that the room was silent; for since her last remark no one had spoken. She sat back on the couch, one arm supporting her cheek, her brow clouded, her eyes fixed on the floor, which her foot tapped with mingled impatience and irritation. Though Monsieur de Sainville had laid down the Revue, he did not think fit to speak. The Canoness knitted with her usual zeal; she occasionally looked up, as if thinking this silence awkward. She coughed, by way of opening the conversation; but this effort having failed, she relapsed into silence; her look, however, still sought her nephew, and wandering from him to Nathalie, rested at length on the young girl.

"*Mon Dieu!* how very strange," she exclaimed, in her sudden way, and laying down her knitting as she spoke; "I wonder I did not notice it before."

Both Nathalie and Monsieur de Sainville looked up.

"It is really extraordinary," she continued, "especially when one considers that there is no relationship. Do you think, Armand, the Montolieus were ever allied to the Sain villes ?"

"No," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with perfect gravity; "I do not think they were."

Nathalie colored, and looked indignant; Aunt Radegonde, without intending it, humbled her. She knew too well that Montolieu was not a name likely to be allied to one of the first names of the province; and being thoroughly democratic in feeling, whatever she might be in theory, she proudly resented all social and aristocratic distinctions.

"Did you notice it, Petite?" resumed the Canoness; "did you see it, Armand? That was why her face seemed so familiar to me."

"See what, aunt?"

"Why the striking likeness of Mademoiselle Montolieu to our aunt Adelaide's portrait."

Nathalie started slightly, but she never changed her attitude to look round. The likeness had not passed unheeded by her. She knew that, in mere beauty, at least, the Provençal girl and the once great lady could have stood side by side: sisters in loveliness and grace. A half-mocking, half-triumphant smile trembled on her lips, and for a moment lit up her changing features. Oh! youth and beauty, whilst your delightful power is felt—and when will it cease?—well may the happy ones who possess you, smile at the unavailing barriers erected by man's jealous pride. Reconciled to herself and restored to good humor, Nathalie looked up half-curiously, half-shyly to hear what Monsieur de Sainville would say. He scanned her features narrowly, then looked at the portrait, eyed her once again, and smiled.

"Yes," said he slowly, "there is a likeness."

There was nothing in the words beyond their plain meaning, but his look was indulgent and very kind; at least Nathalie thought so: she thought that as it rested on her, that look seemed to say: "My dear child, do not trouble yourself for any little heedless things you may have said: I shall not think the worse of you for an evening's nonsense. No doubt, you are eighteen; and may fancy yourself very wise; but, take my word for it, you are a child yet, and not much wiser than when you ate the berries."

Did he really mean this, or had she simply imagined it? Nathalie did not know, and felt puzzled. She consoled herself with the assurance, that it was a matter of no importance to her; that she really did not care. But though she repeated this to herself often enough, she did not lose the opportunity of ascertaining the truth which offered itself to her on the following day.

She had been taking a long walk with the Canoness in the garden, and before going in, they had sat down in a recess of the box-wood hedge. It was a fine evening, mild and hazy, as Nathalie sat by the Canoness on the old stone bench, still warm with the heat of the sun, which was slowly passing away from the garden. She abandoned herself with a vague pleasure to the dreamy charm of the hour. On their left, embosomed amongst its dark evergreens, arose the gray old château, but it looked gay and airy, not sombre, in the mellow light, which softened the hues and outlines of every thing on which it fell; on their right extended the second terrace, dark, lonely, and silent, save for the little fountain, which sent forth a low, plashing sound,—monotonous, yet soothing to the ear. Whilst listening to it, Nathalie reclined back in the seat, and watched the red sunlight gradually fading from the smooth lawn before her. Thence her glance wandered along the windings of one of the many paths around them, until it was arrested by a graceful statue of Diana, rising white and motionless in the cool green light of a distant recess. The fleet and stately huntress was represented in the act of seizing by its antlers a stag, overtaken in the chase. Whilst Nathalie gazed thoughtfully on this copy of a well-known antique, the evening breeze arose, and brought her from the neighboring plantations the strong and penetrating odor of the pine-trees. Then, suddenly, the scene of a long-forgotten episode of her childhood recurred to her, and an involuntary smile flitted across her features.

"Petite," exclaimed the Canoness, "you are thinking of something pleasant or amusing; come, do not be selfish and keep it to yourself."

"Marraine," replied Nathalie, smiling again, and addressing her by the familiar appellation the Canoness had authorized, but which, in her pride, the young girl would not use before Monsieur de Sainville on the preceding evening; "Marraine, you will laugh, call me romantic, and chide."

"Never mind;—it is a second edition of the berries?"

"Almost; but first, tell me which of the heathen deities you prefer?"

"Really," candidly answered Aunt Radegonde, "I do not recollect ever thinking about them."

"What! not think of the nymphs in their limpid streams and cool grottoes? Have you not one there sleeping for ever in her ivy couch? Not think of Flora, as fresh and pure as the first flowers of spring; of cheerful Pomona, with her basket ever full of ripe, sunny fruit; of green-haired Nereids, gliding along the glassy ocean; or magic Syrens, that haunt the rocks and depths of the sea, to lure away unwary mariners? And, above all, not think of Diana, that proud and virgin huntress of the deep woods of Greece? Oh! I have, as a child, thought of them all, of her especially; often,—ay, many a time; and this brings me to what you want to know. I could not help smiling awhile back, because, as I saw that distant statue, and as the wind rose, and the fragrance of the pine-trees came to us here, I remembered a summer morning I spent in a lonely wood a long time ago. I had intentionally strayed away there, instead of going to school. It was not a very vast or romantic wood, but I easily converted it into a dark and solitary Thracian forest, sacred to the goddess. Bow and arrows I had none, but I hunted a few brown squirrels, who gayly leaped from bough to bough, and led me a weary chase. A little stream, a mere silver thread of water, ran through the wood; I sat down on its margin, and imagined it to be one of those deep fountains of icy chillness, near which Diana and her nymphs rested from the chase; at length, fairly overpowered with fatigue, I fell fast asleep, and thus I was found, brought home, scolded, and duly punished for my *escapade*, by the loss of all my holidays. This quite banished Diana and her life of solitary freedom from my thoughts, until just now, when the whole scene rose before me, as I looked at the statue, and I saw myself again a child in the wood, where, half-pleased, half-afraid, I started, and listened to every breeze which brought me, from some mysterious depths, the wild yet pleasing odor of the pine-tree."

Too indulgent to chide, and yet not quite able to sympathize with the romantic fancies of the Provençal girl, the Canoness coughed, and shook her head gently.

"Well," she said at length, "you were quite a child,—so there is not much harm in all this; besides, we are alone to-day, Petite."

Nathalie looked up, flushed, in a moment.

"Does that make any difference?" she asked, rather quickly.

But the Canoness had been meditating all day a homily on the young girl's *légèreté* and want of prudent reserve, and she was quite determined that Nathalie should have the benefit of it now. It proved rather a tedious homily; but so gentle in spirit, and evidently so kindly meant, that Nathalie only smiled, and never dreamed of taking offence.

"You see, Petite," sententiously observed the Canoness, "there are certain secrets——"

"I have no secrets!" interrupted Nathalie.

"Oh! Petite."

"None, I assure you, and it is well for me; I labor, as you said just now, under an infirmity of speech; I cannot keep my tongue quiet when, as I feel,—alas! always too late.—I ought to do so. I do not like silence: it is unsociable, cheerless,—and if to talk be a sin——"

"It is a weakness, a feminine weakness, men say,—but never believe that, child; it is a vile calumny."

"I fear I am very weak, for I like it."

"How strange! I dislike talking."

"Alas! I do not," replied Nathalie, unable to repress an arch smile. "Not speak! why, there are times when I would sooner talk to the trees and bushes than remain silent. Knowing well this fatal indiscretion, I have made it a rule to have no secrets; there is really not one earthly thing I have to hide. May I not therefore talk without any other fear than that of annoying those who may chance to hear me?"

"Ay, Petite, and if we had been alone last evening;—there, you need not color up so."

"But, madame," objected Nathalie, somewhat proudly; "I do not think I said any thing so very wrong, though I have no doubt it was indiscreet and foolish enough."

"True, Petite; but men have such peculiar ideas. In short, I feared you would injure yourself in the opinion of Monsieur de Sainville, who cannot have that deep insight into female character which I possess. So, to learn what he thought, as well as to remove any unpleasing impression, I spoke to him this morning."

She paused and looked at Nathalie; the young girl's color came and went, her head drooped slightly on her bosom, her eyes were fixed upon the earth, and the dark fringe of her eyelashes rested almost on her cheek; she had plucked a twig of boxwood from the hedge, and was now pulling it slowly to pieces, leaf by leaf: she looked like a child at fault, and whom a word can make either penitent or rebellious.

"Well," continued the Canoness, "I spoke very delicately of course—so delicately, that at first he could not make out what I meant. 'Oh!' he said, at length, 'you are talking of Mademoiselle—what is her other name besides Montolieu—Nathalie—ay, Mademoiselle Nathalie. Well, aunt, what of her?' 'Why, Armand, I only wanted to explain to you, that being so young, gay, and pretty—'pretty!' he interrupted, 'how do you know she is pretty? I looked at her last night, and she never kept the same face for five minutes at a time, and I think that her temper is not unlike her face.' You see, Petite, how he noticed about the knitting. Well, I made the best of it, and said I knew by my own experience, how to drop one's stitches would provoke a saint, and so on. He heard me to the end, smiled, and said, 'Be easy, aunt, there is no harm in the poor child.' But though it is all right as yet, pray, Petite, be more prudent another time."

Nathalie did not answer, but her look was no longer fixed on the earth; she seemed little pleased, and more rebellious than penitent.

"And what do I care about Monsieur de Sainville, or his opinion of me?" said the silent but sufficiently expressive curl of her lip.

Aunt Radegonde perceived she had done more harm than good.

"Petite," she said, gravely, "I begin to think you are not easy to manage. I did not mean to tell you something; I see I must, to reconcile you to Armand, who meant well. What do you think he added, when he asked me how I knew that you were pretty?"

"Really, I cannot tell; something very flattering, no doubt. To have no harm in one comprises every thing good, does it not?"

"Oh, no! He only said, 'She is more than pretty, aunt; she is charming.'"

Did the compliment soothe Nathalie's wounded pride? No trace of the feeling appeared, at least on her features.

"Why!" exclaimed the Canoness, somewhat surprised, "I thought you would feel flattered, Petite! Let me tell you that Armand is difficult to please, and that I have not heard him say so of any woman, since his return."

Still Nathalie did not reply. When she spoke at length, it was to say that the evening was very cool, and that she felt chilly.

Aunt Radegonde often declared that she had great experience and penetration, and, above all, that she understood girls thoroughly; but, on this occasion, both acquired knowledge and native genius were at fault; and, whether Nathalie was pleased or not, piqued or flattered, was more than she could discover.

CHAPTER XI.

A WEEK had passed away. Madame Marceau—or to give her the name which, notwithstanding her brother's tacit disapprobation, she persisted in assuming—Madame Marceau de Sainville—had prolonged her visit at the château de Jussac, and, to Nathalie's great satisfaction, did not seem inclined to return in haste.

The autumn, which now began, was the finest that had for many years been known in Normandy, and that week was one of uninterrupted fair weather. The sun rose and set with unclouded splendor; the mornings were clear and sunny; the days warm and bright; the evenings gorgeous and magnificent. As Monsieur de Sainville was now never at home in the day-time, Nathalie wandered about the garden and the grounds with unlimited freedom, and with a sense of enjoyment not marred or disturbed by the prospect of meeting her severe-looking host. In a few days, there was not a retired nook in the whole place that had not become as familiar to her as if she had been born and bred in Sainville. In the intoxication of her delightful freedom, she no longer read or worked; the autumn days were brief and few—she resolved to enjoy them to the utmost; she accordingly visited the solitary green-house in the morning, the cool retreat of the sleeping nymph at noon, and she lingered by the pebbly bank of the little river at evening-time, when deeper shadows fell on the dark yet transparent stream, and the red sunshine slowly passed away from the hills beyond.

Notwithstanding these long walks, Nathalie spent the greater portion of her time with the Canoness. They sat together in the lime-tree avenue, and had endless conversations, which Nathalie, however, never seemed to find tedious; indeed, she proved so excellent and attentive a listener, that she greatly flattered the simple Canoness, and quite won her heart They met Monsieur de Sainville at dinner, and he generally came to spend two or three hours in his aunt's boudoir in the course of the evening. To Nathalie, he was always strictly polite; yet. whether for his own peculiar gratification, or for the more praiseworthy purpose of trying the young girl's temper and patience, he seldom failed to vex or provoke her in some way or other before they parted. She retired to her room greatly offended, woke up somewhat mollified, and went down to breakfast on the following morning not exactly knowing how she ought to behave to Monsieur de Sairville. Without giving her time to reflect, he quietly settled the point, either by taking it as granted that nothing had occurred to disturb their mutual harmony, or by uttering some well-timed remark, which at once restored her to good humor. Nathalie thus learned practically, that if her host knew how to provoke feminine anger, he was not inexpert in the more difficult art of soothing it again. But though he succeeded in pacifying her, he could not remove the unfavorable impression thus produced—an impression which daily grew stronger in her mind against him. All that Rose could urge, failed in satisfying Nathalie that her host behaved well towards her.

On the day fixed for Madame Marceau's return, the two sisters were seated together in the dull salon of Madame Lavigne, and discussing this subject somewhat warmly.

"Is he impertinent?" asked Rose.

"No, certainly he is not."

"Is he patronizing?"

"No; he may be proud enough of his name, wealth and station; but it is only fair to acknowledge that he never shows it."

"Then what does he do?"

"He treats me like a child, Rose; which I consider a very unwarrantable freedom."

Her sister could not repress a smile.

"Are you not a child?" she said.

"A child! Rose: that is too bad. I see you are just like him; but no, for you talk sensibly to me; he never condescends to do so. He scarcely speaks, yet makes me say things at which I afterwards bite my tongue. The other evening, on going up to my room, I thought what a strange man he was, and what strange things he had said; but on examining the matter, I found his most original remark was, that *ennui* was the serpent which tempted Eve. Yet with his provoking way of looking, half-smiling and putting careless questions, he had made me utter one folly after another. I resolved to be on my guard; but it was of no use, for the very next evening I allowed myself to be again provoked into the utterance of I know not how many foolish and impertinent things."

"You could not remain silent!"

"Not when I had begun; it was like a broken string of beads—whilst you tried to fasten it at one end the beads slip off at the other. What vexes me most in this is, that he notices me at all. I am no child; indeed, I could understand him very well if he would only condescend to treat me like a sensible person,—I shall get angry if you smile so, Rose,—but no, though he can talk admirably, as I perceived yesterday, when some visitors came, it is not worth while addressing a foolish girl of eighteen in that strain."

"Nathalie," said her sister, very gravely, "there is a thing I cannot understand; you complain of Monsieur de Sainville, and yet you confessed awhile ago, you were delighted at the prospect of spending the winter at the château."

"Why, Rose, it is very plain," replied Nathalie, coloring; "I do not care about Monsieur de Sainville; that is why."

Rose eyed her sister seriously.

"How thoughtless you are," she said; "if your pride has already suffered in that house, will it not suffer still more? I wish you could have spent the winter here with me."

"Heaven forbid!" quickly exclaimed Nathalie, who colored immediately at the fervor with which she had spoken.

"Yes," said Rose, looking round her with a thoughtful look and a mournful smile; "yes, you are young, gay, and this is a very dreary place. Yet, Nathalie, there are greater misfortunes than a dull home, a dull sister, and a cross aunt; and though it is useless, I wish you were farther away from a world, and from persons a great deal too much above you for your happiness or your pride. How will you feel when you leave your present home for some school like Mademoiselle Dantin's?"

"Miserable, no doubt; but, Rose, why trouble my head about such things, when there is a winter, an age, before me? Why, before the spring comes round something will have turned up."

"What?" asked Rose.

"Oh, never mind what! something good, of course. Why, Rose, I am eighteen,—a gay heiress just entered into possession——"

"Of what?"

"Of hope, dear Rose.—Hope, the fairest lady eye ever saw; and rich.—ay, with castles beyond number. Tell me not I am poor and friendless! Why, there is wealth before me I shall never live to spend, and a friend looks at me from every face I meet. How can you think to cast me down on this lovely morning? Look at that warm sunshine which makes even this dull hole bright; at that bright blue sky beyond; why, even the old gray church tower looks gay and airy to-day."

Rose said nothing.

"I told you," continued her sister, "that I was an heiress; I mistook, Rose;—heiress! pshaw! I am queen; this world is my realm, my reign has just begun, and every joy of mine empire shall come and do me homage. God bless them all with their kind looks and pleasant voices; and what a long, endless train they look, Rose."

"Her head has been turned by romances," said Rose, laying down her work.

Nathalie laughed, and shook her head with joyous grace.

"As if I read romances now!" she said gayly. "What! read fiction with truth itself before me! I should be a child indeed! No. no. Rose; I have a wonderful romance of my own:—each day I turn over a new page, and at the bottom of none do I yet see written the dark word.—Finis."

"You are happy; but for how long?"

"For ever. Who speaks of the sorrows of life? Strange, I feel an inability to suffer. Let those mope and mourn who will. I say this world is a gay place, and the journey through, as pleasant a path as ever was trod."

"And the nettles and the briars?"

"Nettles and briars must be plucked to sting; and touch them I will not whilst there are pleasant wayside flowers to gather. Rose. sorrow is of our own seeking. Some may like a taste of the bitter cup, by way of change, but I do not yet feel cloyed of sweetness. Oh! when one knows how to set about it, this life is a joyful thing."

"And what is it when youth is passed?" asked Rose, sadly But her sister only smiled a bright, sunny smile that would not be dismayed.

"It is no use, Rose," she gayly said; "it is no use; it is like talking of next spring's troubles. I suppose youth must fade; the more is the pity, but I have years of it before me yet, and I will hoard up mine as a miser hoards his gold.

I feel as if I could remain young for ever; why then should I get old? You will say others do; then I will be original, and strike out a path of my own. Oh! the glorious times of simple faith, when travellers set forth to find the fountain of youth! But they might have stayed at home, Rose; for to keep a young heart is the only secret, and the fountain flows freely for all."

"And I verily believe," replied Rose, smiling, in spite of all her efforts to keep grave, "that you will drink of that fountain for ever."

"I told you so; and just in the same way shall I be rich, by making all I behold mine in enjoyment. People possess. that they may enjoy. I enjoy at once, without giving myself the trouble of possessing. You may smile, Rose, but I assure you I am neither proud nor ambitious: the crumbs and mites that fall from my neighbor's table of happiness will do very well for me."

"You are a strange child," said Rose, again laying down her work to look more earnestly at her handsome sister, whose laughing eyes and animated color made her look even more than usually handsome; "shrewd and wise," she continued, "even through all your folly and your foolish dreams."

"Do not touch my dreams," observed Nathalie, looking up quickly; "they have been my only consolation many a time. Oh! the hours I have spent in Mademoiselle Dantin's garden, under the old beech-tree, in the school, in my room, not reading novels, as you so sagely fancy, but dreaming—ay, to my heart's content. Why, of the waking visions which haunted me then, I can still remember some with all the vividness of reality,—the imaginary spots, the dreary deserts, the wild adventures, the perils, escapes, and sudden joys of a deliverance thrill through me still; they come back to me even now with the dull school-room where they had birth: the low murmuring hum of the pupils conning over their lessons, and the quick pattering of the winter rain against the window-panes."

"And where was the use of all this?" asked Rose, very coldly.

"To make me happy for a few hours," composedly answered Nathalie, "which was more than any thing around me could have done."

Rose moved restlessly on her chair, and gave her sister a dreary look; when she spoke, her tone was almost ironical.

"I suppose," she said, "you call this imagination?"

"You may call it so if you like, Rose; it was happiness to me."

She spoke gently, but Rose did not seem mollified.

"Ay, happiness as real as that of Alnaschar."

Nathalie smiled wistfully.

"I love that story, Rose, and I believe every one loves it. We are all Alnaschars in our way, and there lies the charm of the old Arabian tale."

"But will you tell me what remained to you of your imaginary happiness?" persisted Rose.

"Not a basket of broken glass, but pleasant remembrances," replied Nathalie, who seemed to take a perverse pleasure in teazing her sister.

"Oh! if you only knew how pleasant and easy it is, Rose; the school-garden was not very fine, but I could convert it into any thing. Why, an old moss-grown wall has made me as pensive as the most time-honored ruins; a group of aspens has been to me as a whole forest,—a rivulet as a mighty river. We want from nature but the first few primitive notes: in us lies the true melody with its endless variations. I remember an old château in Provence that was to me as a long poem. It stood on the lonely beach within view of the sea. It was very bare and dreary within—what mattered it to me? I hung the walls with soft damask and rarest tapestry. Divine statues looked down in silence from every niche, and imaginary pictures opened long vistas of beauty; clear skies, azure seas, and wild woods,—every thing was there. I filled the hall with the gayest company, a glorious company, that was of every land and all ages, that I could summon or dismiss at will. Rose, do not frown, do not look so severe—indeed, our world is too narrow. What avails it that we are born and have our being, if we must be shut up within so limited a sphere? Why may we not see and know those we could love and venerate? Alas! those that might have been every thing to us too often belonged to some other age—they were gone before we had birth. Have you never felt cheated and betrayed out of your due, because that being remained perforce a stranger? Oh! affection should not be the creature of a day; the gates of death should not possess that mysterious power,—they should not be that awful barrier between the quick and the dead!" Why is this, Rose? Are we such miserable creatures, so poor in heart, that there is only room for those around us,—for one little narrow circle!"

Her countenance, late so gay, was now grave, her look earnest and thoughtful, her face turned towards Rose, inquiringly; but her sister coldly answered:

"Your talk is too high-flown for me; I suppose you will fall in love with some dead hero, one day, and quarrel with Providence, because you cannot have him. I wish you would confine your speech and feelings to reality."

"Reality, reality!" impatiently exclaimed Nathalie; "why reality is but the dregs of the cup, Rose; imagination is the clear red wine."

"The bubbling foam would have been a more appropriate emblem," said Rose, rather ironically.

Nathalie tapped her foot impatiently.

"You may say what you like, Rose," she warmly exclaimed, "but take imagination from life, and nothing remains. Oh! reality is too cold and cheerless a dame for me. I once saw an old ruin in the sunshine: the moss, the ivy, the gay yellow wall flower peeped from every cranny; a bird was lining its nest in a hole, and green lizards, glittering like emeralds, came in and out and basked in the light: the sky was blue beyond, the sun shone very brightly. Rose, it was the gayest ruin you ever saw; just the sort of place that would give one lightness of heart, and a wish to sing. I passed by it a few days later: the sky was dark and dull—it had been raining. The wall-flowers were beaten about by the wind, the moss hung dripping against the old stones, the ivy clung to them like a dark pall,—bird, lizards, sunshine, all were gone,—reality was there alone. Now, Rose, if one can keep the sunshine of life for ever over that cold stony ruin, reality, where is the harm?"

"Wait to see, until your first sorrow comes," said Rose, briefly.

"Rose, you are very unkind; you do all you can to depress me. I am endeavoring to show you some other way to happiness, besides that which lies through the miserably dull route you call reality. This room, I suppose, is reality; Mademoiselle Dantin's horrid school-room was reality; but I tell you that my world is far more real, because it is far more beautiful. We need not see beauty to enjoy it, Rose; it is inward. A sunbeam, a sound, a word, a breath, awaken or create all that need be the soul's desire. I have had all sunny Italy in the deep blue sky of noonday; the plaintive murmur of the wind in the branches of a lonely pine has given me the dreary forests of the north, with their gigantic trees rising, dark and spectre-like, through the thick flakes of falling snow, as I once read of them in some old book of travels; a whole pastoral landscape, with valley. low hills, quiet homesteads, and homeward-going cattle, has risen before me, with the scent of the new-made hay at evening. Why the other morning, the low ripple of the little stream that runs at the bottom of the garden brought me back the deep and hollow murmur of the sea, with its endless waves still breaking on the beach."

"Do you often go on in that way at the château?" inquired Rose.

"No, Rose; for I do not often feel as I feel to-day."

"Yes, I can see something has pleased you, and so you behold all *couleur de rose:* what is it?"

"I give you my word I do not know, Rose. But you are right; something must have pleased me; for, indeed, as you say, every thing wears a most rosy hue. There surely never was so lovely an autumn morning: the air is soft, yet exquisitely transparent; the breeze is genial as a breeze of spring; that deep blue sky would almost do for Provence. Oh! Rose, I feel very religious to-day; blessed be He who has given us all this life and joy!"

The window was open; Nathalie half-leaned out, her elbow resting on the window-sill, her cheek supported by the palm of her hand. The soft morning breeze played around her, and fanned her cheeks, whose deepened bloom bespoke some inward emotion; her eyes shone brightly, but with deep softness in all their fire; her lips were slightly parted, and her breath came fast. Rose thought that as she raised her hand to arrange her hair, it trembled slightly. She looked excited, but it was the excitement which soon subsides into languor. Her sister eyed her again, and, familiar as it was to her, she now wondered at the young girl's beauty.

"*Mon Dieu!* what is the matter with you to-day?" she slowly asked.

Nathalie only smiled.

"Has any thing made you feel glad?"

"Nothing, that I know of. Is it a wonder that I should be gay? Then here comes one who will do all she can to check the mood."

The door opened as the spoke, and Madame Lavigne entered, supported by Désirée, who left immediately.

"Who was that talking?" sharply asked the blind woman, when Rose had helped her to her seat.

"Guess?" replied Nathalie.

"Oh! you. Your voice sounds cheerful to-day. What has pleased you?"

"Nothing. and there is the beauty of it. To be gay with good reason is no wonder; but what joy so sweet as nameless joy,—unless it be a nameless hope?"

The blind woman smiled her own sour smile.

"So you feel glad?" she said

"So glad that you cannot put me out of temper."

"We shall see. How is the best friend?"

"Very well."

"Kind still?"

"Very kind."

"Have you quarrelled yet?"

"Quarrelled! No."

"Then he is very foolish."

Nathalie looked annoyed, but she scorned to reply.

"There!' triumphantly cried Madame Lavigne, "you are already vexed."

"No, I am not."

"Yes. you are; and. poor child! well you may be. What! have you been a whole fortnight in his house, and has he not given you an opportunity of showing your temper? Mademoiselle Dantin knew your worth better than that. I knew you better than that: we quarrel every time we meet, for you are nothing, unless when you are teazed."

"And how do you know I have not been teazed?" quickly asked Nathalie.

"I knew I could make you confess it," said Madame Lavigne, maliciously.

"I have confessed nothing," cried Nathalie, coloring.

"Yes, you have," replied the blind woman, smiling bitterly; "your vanity could not resist the bait I laid out for it. Oh! I know girls, and their ways. But come, child, do not be too vain, because he notices you a little; you amuse him just now, but when the novelty is worn off, why your best friend will not seem to know you are in the house."

"You cannot tell," said Nathalie, a little scornfully.

"Yes, I can; do I not know how these things go on? Why, child, do not be foolish; do not forget you are only his aunt's companion, after all."

As her aunt uttered this taunt, Rose looked at her sister. She could detect an expression of pain and wounded pride passing over the features of Nathalie, but it did not last; and when she spoke, her tone was composed and cool.

"Madame," she said, "you quite mistake Monsieur de Sainville; he is not capricious or selfish, as you seem to think—as such conduct would imply; he treats me, not as his aunt's companion, but as his guest."

"Capricious or selfish!" said Madame Lavigne. "Ah! I understand—a hint about Rose. So your best friend is not that. And what is your best friend like, child? Have you any objection to describe him to me?"

"None," unhesitatingly replied Nathalie. "He is good, just, and, though cold, kind. You now know him as well as I do."

"I do not like perfect characters," snappishly answered Madame Lavigne.

She looked sour and displeased, and refused to answer, save by a cool nod, to the cheerful adieu of Nathalie, who was now preparing to depart.

The young girl was turning towards the door, when it opened, and admitted no less a personage than Mademoiselle Dantin, accompanied by the Chevalier. Nathalie started, colored, and then, in spite of all her efforts, could scarcely keep grave. The schoolmistress closed the door, and eyed her former teacher with haughty majesty; the Chevalier looked both distressed and pleased; Rose remained calm; Madame Lavigne turned her head about, listened keenly, though not a word was spoken, and appeared to be conscious that something agreeable to her was at hand.

"What!" she exclaimed, rubbing her hands, "it is that good, that kind Mademoiselle Dantin come to pay us a visit; and the dear Chevalier, too. My dear little Nathalie, I hope you are not gone. Where are you, mignonne? Here is Mademoiselle Dantin, whom you are so fond of."

Mademoiselle Dantin coughed a short indignant cough, and looked daggers, first at her sightless friend, then at the Chevalier, who had respectfully approached the young girl. A smile trembled on Nathalie's lip; she tried to repress it, but in vain—the smile broke forth. Willing to make the best of an awkward position, she turned towards the schoolmistress, and said, frankly:

"Is there any reason why we should not be friends?"

Mademoiselle Dantin shot an angry glance at the Chevalier, then closed her eyes and gently inclined her head towards her left shoulder.

"Friends! she was in a state of friendship with the whole human race."

"I am willing to believe it," said Nathalie, a little impatiently; "though we did not part exactly as friends part. I believe. however, that you labored under an honest mistake. If you were severe, I was, to say the least, impatient; but surely this is no reason for mutual and very unavailing enmity."

"Enmity, Mademoiselle Montolieu!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, casting around her a look of astonishment; "I protest against the word; it is unnatural in this part of the country, though I have no doubt that in the unhappy south it is. alas! frequent enough."

The eyes of Nathalie lit up indignantly.

"You are unchanged," she said; "but you are right, quite right;—yes, in the south we hear of enmity,—but it is a breath, a word; here it is unspoken, to lie hidden in the heart."

Madame Lavigne laughed, and rubbed her hands with malicious glee.

"Fine day!" she said; "rather hot in this room too! Will Mademoiselle Dantin and Mademöiselle Montolieu both stay and dine with a poor invalid?"

"Stay!" indignantly cried Nathalie; "stay in this room; no—not one second longer."

The Chevalier vainly began a speech about amiable ladies and the gentleness of the sex. The schoolmistress gave him a scornful glance; Nathalie had turned away, and the door had flown open and again closed upon her. She had reached the door below, and was vainly endeavoring to unlock it, when a hand arrested her. She turned round; it was Rose, looking grave and severe.

"Come in here," said she, pointing to a small and gloomy parlor, of which the door stood half-open. Nathalie complied, docile and subdued in an instant.

"Well, Rose," she hesitatingly said, "I know you are not pleased; but could I help it? Surely it was spiteful of her to speak so about the south."

"That was no reason why you should give way to your temper."

"But, Rose, I cannot bear it. Do you think," she added, whilst the pride of race deepened the color on her cheek, "do you think I have forgotten that these litigious Normans are descended from the savage barbarians of the north, whilst we are the children of Greece and Rome?"

"Try and speak sensibly, child," said Rose, shrugging her shoulders; "and pray remember that your sister is a genuine and cool Normande."

"You, Rose," exclaimed Nathalie, whilst her eyes glistened; "Oh! you are of those that belong to no race and no clime: you are a saint,—an angel upon earth."

"Angel as I am," decisively said Rose, "I am going to scold you."

"Scold! Rose; I will hear you patiently. Be just, and acknowledge that I have never yet quarrelled with you, or what you said."

"No, my poor child," replied Rose, who seemed a little moved, "and yet I have been severe; you are right: you have been patient."

"Because I love, I revere you, Rose," cried Nathalie eagerly, and pressing her sister's hands as she spoke; "when I love I can be patient, I can endure; but from such beings as Mademoiselle Dantin, or your cross old aunt,—never."

"Ay, and nothing would content you this morning but to teaze my aunt."

"I merely refused to gratify her ill-nature, by speaking ill of Monsieur de Sainville."

"Do you think of him all you said?" gravely asked Rose.

The two sisters still stood in the little parlor, Nathalie with her back to the narrow window, whence a pale light descended on the calm features of Rose, who detected, nevertheless, the deepening color on her sister's cheek.

"If I say that I spoke so for the praiseworthy purpose of vexing your aunt, you will look grave, Rose, will you not?" she at length replied.

Rose did look very grave.

"I do not understand this trifling, Nathalie; indeed I do not," she said, very seriously. "Oh! if you would only promise me to be prudent!"

"Ask something I can promise, Rose; that is impossible, for it is not in my nature to fear; and prudence is only fear, with a wise cloak on."

"Then promise me to remember a very wise thing you said up-stairs."

"A wise thing! Did you say a wise thing, Rose? Oh! for the wonder of having said a wise thing, I will promise any thing. What was it?"

"That sorrow was of our own seeking," gravely answered her sister.

"Did I really say that?" inquired Nathalie, looking a little thoughtful; "and was that a wise thing?"

"A true one, at least."

"Well, then, Rose, I shall keep to this wisdom, and dutifully avoid all sorrow. I suppose this is your meaning—the best means of accomplishing which is to take all the happiness this world of ours can afford me."

Rose shook her head and sighed.

"Rose," said her sister, "you are devout, but verily I have more faith than you have. I believe in happiness, little as I have known of it; I believe in it with my whole soul—ay, with my whole heart," she added, pressing both her hands to her bosom.

"And I also believe in happiness," answered Rose, in a low tone; "but oh! sister, not in the vain, dreary happiness of this world."

She, too, had clasped her hands, but as they are clasped in prayer. When her look met that of her sister, it implied fervent faith—the faith of all that the soul can hope of joy hereafter; even as in the clear look of the younger girl might be read the delightful hopes and divine promises which the earthly future still holds out to the ardent and impassioned soul of youth.

As Rose gazed on that radiant face, she felt, perhaps, how unavailing it was to pour forth the fears and doubts of her maturer years into the ear of a being still so rich in the wealth of her golden youth. She sighed, but spoke no more, and merely laid her thin hand on the young girl's shoulder, and pressed her pale lips on her clear brow in token of adieu.

They parted. As she turned the angle of the court, Nathalie looked round, and smiled again at her grave sister, who, after lingering awhile on the threshold, was silently closing on herself the door of her gloomy home.

CHAPTER XII.

On entering the drawing-room, Nathalie, who had expected to find only the Canoness, was somewhat disconcerted to perceive Madame Marceau, and a lady, in whom she recognized Madame de Jussac. After a moment of hesitation she came forward, for, though her presence was any thing but agreeable to her, pride would not allow her to draw back or look disconcerted.

Madame Marceau held out her hand with smiling welcome, and protested that Mademoiselle Montolieu looked charmingly. This was addressed to the lady by her side, who, by acquiescing, showed that she knew who Mademoiselle Montolieu was; they had met at Mademoiselle Dantin's school, where, with little regard to the ceremonial of rank or wealth, Madame de Jussac had once left her daughters during a temporary absence at Paris.

Madame de Jussac was a fair and aristocratic lady of middle age. She had been handsome, and was handsome still,—but of a pale and tranquil sort of beauty, that contrasted strikingly with the dark and anxious face of her friend. She seldom spoke, yet no one thought her silent. When Madame Marceau addressed her, she answered with a gentle inclination of the head, a quiet smile that displayed her ivory teeth, or a slow look of her soft blue eyes, and all this was quite as significant as the other lady's full and stately speech. She seemed as averse to unnecessary motion as to superfluous discourse; once she had fairly settled herself on a couch or sofa, she did not care to leave it, but reclined there for hours, in an attitude of repose that was not without a certain indolent grace. Her chief occupation seemed to be to fan herself slowly during the heat of the day. The first day of her sojourn at Sainville—for she had come to stay a week—appeared very dull to Nathalie. Aunt Radegonde had retired to her room with a bad headache, and the young girl kept as much as possible out of the way of the two ladies. After dinner, which was unusually early, and at which Monsieur de Sainville, being away, did not appear, Nathalie retired to the deep recess of one of the drawing-room windows, and sat there alone, shrouded from observation by the crimson curtain. The ladies spoke in a subdued tone; but even had their discourse been louder, Nathalie would not have heeded it. She worked at her embroidery, and occasionally put it down to watch the darkening and stormy-looking sky. When the sun set in the west. a sudden and lurid light spread over the whole landscape, and threw its flame-like glow over the sere foliage of the avenue, and the road and landscape beyond. It was at this moment that the door opened, and Amanda entered. At first Nathalie paid no attention to what she said ; but she suddenly became attentive ; it was Madame Marceau who was speaking.

"Who could have thought our quiet little river would ever act so?" she said, in a tone of calm concern. "An inundation ! I am truly sorry for those poor people. Will they lose all their crops ? But what has Monsieur de Sainville to do with this, Amanda ?"

"He is in the boat, madame."

"In the boat !" exclaimed Madame Marceau. with sudden alarm. "Good heavens ! what has he to do with the boat ? Surely those people could save their crops without Monsieur de Sainville risking his life !"

"I believe I may assure madame, there is no danger whatever. But the place is so lonely that there is only one man at home ; the rest were out far away in the fields ; and Monsieur de Sainville, perceiving there was no time to lose, very kindly offered his aid."

"I am astonished !" impatiently said Madame Marceau ; "surely, my brother might have made their loss good to those people ; a few stacks of corn can never be worth all the trouble he is taking. Is it far up the river ? Can we see any thing from the end of the garden, I wonder ? *Ma bonne*, shall we go and try to look on ?"

Madame de Jussac languidly assented. There was a rustling sound of silken robes ; then a door closed softly, and all was still. Nathalie emerged from her retreat. Amanda, who had lingered behind the two ladies, uttered a faint scream.

"I beg mademoiselle's pardon," she said, recovering at once, "but I did not know mademoiselle was there ; and when she came out, looking so pale and frightened——"

"What is it ? Are you sure there is no danger ? What is Monsieur de Sainville doing in that boat ? How did all this happen ?"

The young girl spoke in a brief. almost imperative tone. Amanda eyed her with slight surprise. but composedly replied that the river had suddenly overflowed its banks at some distance up the stream, and carried away the stacks of corn belonging to the poor cottagers who lived by the river-side. Monsieur de Sainville was riding by at the time of the accident; perceiving the necessity of prompt assistance, he had immediately dismounted and offered his aid.

"And how do you know this?" asked Nathalie.

"I met a woman who was going to Sainville to fetch assistance, and send up another boat."

"A nice messenger! To lose her time in telling you all this, instead of going on at once," impatiently exclaimed the young girl.

She took her scarf lying on a chair, as she spoke, and quickly went down to the garden.

She found Madame Marceau and her friend standing by the water-side, at the end of the third terrace. She drew near. A bend in the river allowed the eye to look up the stream for a considerable distance. It was the opposite bank, which was much lower than that on which the château stood, that had suffered. The fields, which Nathalie had seen that very morning fresh and green, were now covered with a rolling sheet of dark and heavy water, over which lowered a leaden and sullen-looking sky; in the distance she perceived a few dark spots rising above the stream,—these were stacks of corn. Her heart ached, as she remembered how, a few days before, she had spent a whole afternoon, sitting in the high grass, at the foot of a tree, watching the reapers 'midst the yellow corn, and listening to their far and joyous singing. A black speck appeared in the distance—it was the boat crossing over to the submerged bank; in the taller of the two rowers, Nathalie thought she could recognize Monsieur de Sainville; she felt sure that it was he, when he rose for a moment, and the outline of his figure appeared dark and distinct on the gray sky. The boat approached the nearest stack—then there was a pause, which seemed to Nathalie as if it would never end; at last the boat moved once more, but it moved slowly, for it was heavily laden; once, in the very middle of the stream, it stood quite still, and the water looked so dark and threatening, as it rushed by, its swollen tide crested with a thin white foam, that Nathalie turned pale, and felt as if her heart ceased to beat; but the rowers were only pausing for rest—the boat soon moved again;—in a few minutes, it had safely reached the shore.

Nathalie gave a sigh of relief, and looked at Madame Mar ceau, who stood watching all, through her opera-glass. She lowered it, and said, very calmly:

"A similar thing occurred last year, I believe. Those people might really have been more careful. Armand is so prudent and courageous, that I do not fear for him; I have besides been given to understand that the water never rises above a certain height."

"Indeed!" said Madame de Jussac, with a slight yawn, and looking as if she longed to be back again on the easy drawing-room sofa.

Nathalie beheld with astonishment their well-bred ease and indifference. Any thing resembling a deed to do, an adventure to accomplish, a peril to brave, even though she could only be a passive looker-on, sent the blood to her heart in a more rapid tide, and made her whole frame thrill with excitement. The cries and lamentations of the women and children, which the wind brought down distinctly to her ear; the sight of that frail boat gliding over the heaving and swollen river; of the dark sky above, heavy with threatening clouds; of the corn, now loosened from the stacks, and carried down by the rapid stream; the thought of the impending ruin of so many families, of the risk run to save their little property, of the courage displayed in thus seeking danger, and holding life so cheap, when there was an aim in view, so moved and roused her, that she could not refrain from clapping her hands when a boat from Sainville, with eager and bending rowers, cheering as they went, shot past, like an arrow, on its way to the scene of destruction.

"How cool it is!" said Madame de Jussac, with a slight shiver.

"I think we shall have a storm, too," observed Madame Marceau.

And, with mutual and tacit consent, the two ladies turned homewards. Nathalie never perceived their departure. She stood on the very brink of the water, half-bending forward, her hand shading her eyes, her look eagerly following the boat, which soon joined the other.

The task now proceeded rapidly. The two boats rivalled in promptitude and zeal; they crossed and recrossed the water, now heavily laden, now light and empty. At length there came a lull; all that could be rescued of the corn seemed to be stowed in safety; the waters over the flooded fields flowed in a dark and even tide, with here and there a wandering sheaf, tossed by an eddy of the stream. One of the boats remained, to save all that still floated on the surface; the other slowly came down the stream, towards the spot where Nathalie stood, watching its progress. It neared the bank; stopped by a convenient landing-place; Monsieur de Sainville leaped out; thanked the man, who touched his cap, and rowed back to the spot whence he had come.

As her host evidently did not see her, it would have been more proper and discreet for Nathalie to retire than to remain. But she was inquisitive and *naïve* in her curiosity, like a true southern, and therefore stayed until Monsieur de Sainville came up to her. He could not repress a slight exclamation of wonder on seeing her there, standing by the water's edge, with her light dress fluttering in the wind, and her anxious face eagerly turned towards him. She mistook his brief ejaculation for one of pain, and, stepping forward, said quickly:

"Are you hurt, sir?"

"Hurt! No," he replied, with increased surprise; and his scrutinizing look said, "What are you doing here?"

She did not heed it; but continued:

"Is the corn all safe, sir?"

"Almost all."

"And was there no accident!"

"None whatever."

"But how tired you must feel!"

"No, thank you," he quietly replied. "I was formerly fond of rowing, and have not lost the habit yet."

"But this was a very dangerous task, was it not?" continued Nathalie.

"Not in the least," he answered, with a smile. "But allow me to say, you did wrong to linger here on this dark evening."

Nathalie looked round; she saw that the two ladies, whom she had quite forgotten, were gone. Behind and around her stretched a gloomy and threatening sky, which seemed more gloomy still, as it lay reflected, with its mass of clouds, in the dark and sullen waters of the swollen river. She turned quietly towards Monsieur de Sainville, and said simply:

"I never heard them going."

"Then my sister and Madam de Jussac were here. Why did you remain behind? Did you not see the storm coming fast?"

"No; I was looking at the boats, and never thought of the sky."

"Nor of the rain," said he, looking down at the large drops which had already stained the stone steps on which they stood; for they had turned homewards whilst speaking thus, and were going up to the second terrace.

"Do you think it will thunder?" asked Nathalie, who preceded him, and now turned round with sudden alarm.

Before he could reply, a flash of lightning crossed the sky behind her; she only saw it by the lurid light which passed over the grave features of Monsieur de Sainville; but she turned very pale, and trembled from head to foot, when the peal of thunder followed in rapid succession.

"You are afraid of thunder," he said, with some surprise.

"Very much," she replied; and her pale lips and chattering teeth showed there was no affectation in the fear.

He gave a quick look around him; the rain was falling fast: the sky was deepening in gloom.

"It is useless to think of reaching the house," he decisively observed; "will you have the goodness to come this way?"

He went down the steps as he spoke; the stone was already wet and slippery. He held out his hand to her; she took it and followed him with silent docility: but when she saw him entering the grounds, she could not help saying,

"Where are we going sir?"

"To the pavilion," he quietly replied.

This pavilion was only a little rotunda, or summer-house of rustic work. The roof was thatched, and the walls were made of young larch-trees, with the bark on. It stood in a lonely spot, surrounded by large and wide-spreading beeches. Aunt Radegonde had one day pointed it out to Nathalie as Armand's favorite retreat; "he comes there for several hours every day to smoke," she said; "for he is kind and considerate, and knows how I hate the smell of either pipe or cigar about the house." The rain poured down in torrents; this was no time to remonstrate or object: Nathalie did neither, but walked quickly with Monsieur de Sainville along a shady and covered path. In a few minutes they had reached the place; he raised the latch, she entered, he followed her in, and closed the door behind him. Scarcely were they within, when the storm burst forth in all its fury; flash followed flash, and peal was heard upon peal. Nathalie hid her face in her hands, and now and then looked up with a frightened start; whilst Monsieur de Sainville calmly assured her that there was little or no danger, that the storm was not so nigh as she thought, and that the lightning was much more likely to be attracted by some of the tall trees, than by their little thatched refuge. The young girl endeavored to seem attentive, but she evidently heeded more the thunder than his arguments; and at length, he could not help asking her again, how she had remained behind, being so much afraid of the storm as she was.

"Because I never thought about it," she quietly replied.

As the storm lessened, Nathalie, feeling somewhat ashamed of her timidity, assumed a composed air, and glanced around her with a look half-shy and half-curious. The retreat of Monsieur de Sainville was not encumbered with needless furniture, for there were only two chairs, a small buffet, and a round table fixed in the centre of the room, all of rustic work. At one end of the room stood a low chimney, framed in iron; over it were suspended large pipes of peculiar shape, and a gleaming blade half-drawn from its scabbard. Facing the chimney was a little arched window, opening a gloomy vista into winding alleys, close thickets, and groups of bushes of the melancholy-looking pine-tree, now seen through a veil of white and heavy rain, and by the pale light of rapid lightning flashes.

Nathalie felt her heart beating with something between pleasure and fear. As she listened to the vague and moaning sounds of the storm without, and looked on that wild prospect, half-wrapped in mysterious gloom, she fancied herself a belated traveller, lost in some primeval forest solitude. Monsieur de Sainville fell into her mood, by observing:

"Mademoiselle Nathalie, I hope you like my hermitage. Pray please your romantic fancy for me; imagine me the sober hermit, yourself the damsel of old, reaching this solitary refuge, after many perilous wanderings. You must be wet and cold,—will you not warm yourself, whilst I produce my hermit's fare?"

She turned round; a wood fire was kindling on the hearth with a crackling sound: he drew a chair for her. She sat down by the fire, for she felt chilly; in the mean while he opened the buffet, and drew forth a glass, a flask of wine, and a small wheaten loaf, all of which he placed on the table before her.

"Real hermit's fare," he said; "though I rather suspect hermits drank water; but not happening to have a limpid stream—are not those the words?—running past my door, I must needs be content with wine, and have nothing better to offer to an unprotected guest."

He poured out some wine as he spoke; she thanked him, but did not touch it; she was bending over the fire, and looked cold and pale; he eyed her uneasily, said she would certainly take cold, and urged her to throw off her wet scarf and dry her feet. There was something of kindly imperativeness in his manner; she complied, with silent docility, and took off both scarf and slippers. Her host helped her to shake the first; then, as she knelt on the hearth, and held it to the fire, he took up one of her slippers and also held it close to the heat, so that it might dry more quickly. Nathalie looked at him in silent wonder. "*Mon Dieu!*" she thought, "what would Madame Marceau say, if she could see her brother drying my slippers?"

In her simplicity, the young girl thought that she had wronged Monsieur de Sainville—that he was not so proud as she had once imagined him to be. In reality, he was much more so. Besides the personal pride she had justly attributed to him, her host had the pride of his race and birth in the highest degree. He was proud of his station, to which he never alluded—of his ancestors, whom he had too much good taste ever to mention—of all, in short, that had made him Armand de Sainville. But the pride of the old French noblesse has always gone hand in hand with a chivalrous courtesy of manner that distinguishes them still. Nathalie need have felt no surprise on seeing her host thus philosophically attending on her; he belonged to that race of *gentilhommes* whose most aristocratic monarch, Louis XIV, bared his head and bowed low to the poorest peasant girl who ever crossed his path.

Whilst drying the young girl's *pantoufle*, Monsieur de Sainville eyed it somewhat curiously. Nathalie, like a true French woman, though simple to an excess in her dress, was very fastidious about her *chaussure*. The slipper which he held was merely of black satin, but so small, so quaintly cut, and so coquettish, that, though not made of glass, it might have rivalled the famous *pantoufle* of Cinderella. He could not repress a smile, as he looked at it, and turned it round on his hand, like some childish thing. With good-humored reproof, he asked Nathalie if she seriously thought such flimsy little things could be of any possible use? She looked rather indignant, on hearing her favorite slippers thus maligned, and quickly replied, that, though so slight, they were very good and very strong; upon which he shook his head, and looked skeptical.

The scarf soon dried, and so did the slippers; Nathalie quietly put them on, unseen, as she thought, by Monsieur de Sainville, who stood at one angle of the fire-place, looking down abstractedly on the burning embers on the hearth. As she rose, her hair, heavy with rain, fell down in dishevelled tresses; she was impatiently fastening it up again, damp as it was, when he quietly observed:

"Do let your hair dry, Mademoiselle Nathalie; it is quite wet."

"He sees every thing," pettishly thought the young girl; but she silently complied, and once more knelt down facing him. He seemed abstracted; she wondered what he could be thinking about, and in wondering looked; the result of which was that he immediately caught her eye, and seeing her slightly confused, asked which of the pipes had attracted her attention.

"This is a very peculiar looking one," evasively replied Nathalie, too frank to like or freely accept an excuse.

"This is not a pipe," said he, taking it down as he spoke, "but a pistol."

She started up in alarm; he smiled and assured her there was no danger; but Nathalie looked skeptical and uneasy; she had a vague suspicion that pistols were always loaded, and always on the point of going off. Ashamed of the fear she had betrayed, she knelt once more, but could not help thinking that Monsieur de Sainville must be a strange suspicious man, to have those deadly weapons around him even in that quiet summer-house.

"It is a travelling habit I have taken," he calmly said; "I assure you it gives a peculiar sense of security and independence. With just that little instrument in my hand"—he handled it as he spoke—"though not half so formidable looking as yonder pipe, it will go hard indeed if I do not remain my own master. The law is a good thing; the police is useful, watchful servants are beyond praise, but that which enables a man to do without them all is better far."

He replaced the pistol as he spoke; then perceiving Nathalie's glass still full, he urged her to take some of the wine he had poured out for her.

"You will like it," he quietly observed.

She raised the glass to her lips, then quickly laid it down and looked at her host; he was smiling, and seemed to enjoy her surprise.

"But this is a Provençal wine," she said with some emotion;

"the ciotat muscat, which I never tasted since I came to Normandy."

"Yes, it is the ciotat; I had some at Arles, and liked it so well that I ordered a certain quantity of it when I came here."

"Arles! You have been at Arles?" exclaimed the young girl, eagerly looking at him, and eyeing him from head to foot, as if the mere fact of having been at Arles must have produced some change in his person.

"Yes, indeed, I have; I was coming from Beaucaire."

"Beaucaire!" she interrupted. "You have been at Beaucaire, also? Did you see the great fair?"

"I went there for that purpose, four years ago."

"*Mon Dieu!* that was the very time I went with my poor aunt. How strange we did not meet?"

"Yes," he said, very seriously; "it is peculiar."

"Was it not a fine fair? How gay the narrow streets looked with the signs of blue, red, and yellow cloth crossing from one side to the other, and the white linen awning over all! And then the rich goods displayed at every door! Carpets, costly arms, rich silks, and jewels in heaps,—yes, every thing was there. My aunt told me some of the merchants had travelled hundreds of miles to exhibit and sell their goods. I believe they were of every nation under the sun. I saw Italians, Spaniards, and Germans, too, amongst the Europeans; but I looked most at the Turks, who seemed so solemn; the Armenians, who had such wily faces; and the Greeks, who were so handsome! Did you see them? My aunt said it was the finest fair that had ever been at Beaucaire; and though we only came for a few days, we remained the whole of the first week."

"So did I," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Then I am quite sure we must have met," exclaimed Nathalie, looking delighted; "of course, we did not know one another,—I was much shorter than I am now,—but still we met at that fair of Beaucaire."

She spoke as if they were old acquaintances, and, indeed, nothing now could have convinced her that they were not so. She had spent a week at Beaucaire, four years ago, so had he; —the town was small, her walks had been confined to the principal streets, so must his have been;—it was evident they had met,—and if they had met, how could they be strangers? From that hour the date of their acquaintanceship retrograded four years. He adopted the same logical reasoning, for he said with a smile,—

"We certainly did meet; indeed, I seem to recollect noticing a young girl, of fourteen or so, on the boat that took me to Arles; and she was decidedly like you," he added, looking at her fixedly.

"Was she with an old lady?" demurely asked Nathalie.

"Precisely,—with an old lady."

"And had she white muslin on?"

"I really think she had."

"How strange!" said Nathalie, seeming much amused.

"I see nothing strange in it," he replied, quite gravely; "we were at the fair together, and went home by the boat,—it was perfectly natural."

"Yes, it would be, if it did not so happen that I never went home by the boat at all;" replied Nathalie, looking very merry and mischievous.

Monsieur de Sainville looked slightly disconcerted. He was a grave man, unacquainted with girls; he had certainly never expected that any young girl would carry her audacity so far as to make game of him to his very face. He frowned slightly, and looked down at her with a displeased mien,—but though her color rose a little, her look still fearlessly met his. He could not help smiling, and saying in a good-humored tone, that he must have been deceived by a casual likeness.

"How did you like Beaucaire, sir?" Nathalie hastened to ask; for she was not quite sure she had not gone too far, and wished to change the subject.

"Not half so well as Arles."

"Then you liked Arles?" she exclaimed, looking at him a little wistfully, whilst something tremulous was in her tone as she uttered the name of her native and much-loved city.

"Who would not like that venerable old place, with its mighty ruins, some of them so fresh that it seems as if the Romans had left them but yesterday! With its women, whose strange beauty is like to none other; for they have a charm between eastern fire and classic grace, and when they seem most calm, there is still something of southern passion in their look and in their mien."

Oh! subtle and exquisite indeed is the flattery of the land and race we love! Nathalie felt its power in the deepest recesses of her heart. Even as Monsieur de Sainville spoke, a bright vision slowly rose before her on the dark wall of the little hermitage: she beheld the broad Rhone gliding swiftly at the foot of a dark and ancient city, crowned with Roman ruins, and rising in the warm sunlight against the deep blue southern sky. See beheld it and looked until her eyes became dimmed with tears. Then the vision faded away: she saw once more the dark night without; within, the fire-lit hermitage, and Monsieur de Sainville standing before her and looking down at her very kindly.

"I have grieved you," he said.

"Oh! no, sir. You have made me feel so happy! Not since I left Arles have I met any one who had seen it, or cared to hear about it."

"Poor child!" he compassionately said; "the change must have been great indeed, from Provence to Normandy."

"The home sickness was on me for a whole year. I could not sleep, and scarcely eat. The doctor said I must go back to the south, or die; but he was mistaken, for, with the blessing of God, I got better."

Monsieur de Sainville was not given to questioning; but he now seemed in the interrogative mood, for he made many inquiries concerning the life Nathalie led at Mademoiselle Dantin's. Her heart was opened, since she felt they had met at the fair of Beaucaire, and she answered freely. A few graphic, but not resentful, touches sketched Mademoiselle Dantin; the little Chevalier was not forgotten. She also spoke of her favorite pupils; of the grief it was to part from them; of her lonely walks in the garden; of the dreaming hours spent in her solitary room; and in all she said, there was girlish piquancy, blending with a simple and homely grace. He listened to her, with an occasional smile, that showed he always remained attentive, and yet with a sort of abstraction in his manner that rendered it very difficult to say how far he really cared for the ready replies his questions found,—how much he was guided by politeness, and how much by interest.

"Your life must have been dull at that school," he said, at length. "Did you never go to parties of pleasure,—to balls, or any thing of the kind?"

"I went to five balls," she replied, with the prompt and accurate memory of one whose pleasures had been few and far between.

"Do you care about dancing?"

She eyed him wonderingly. Did she care about it! Well these serious gentlemen, who cared about nothing themselves did ask strange questions.

"Yes," she answered, "she liked it very much."

"Better than that Provençal ciotat?" said he, looking at her glass.

Nathalie drank the wine; but when she laid down her empty glass on the table, she remembered that Monsieur de Sainville had tasted nothing. The buffet was open; her eye ran hastily over it; there was no second glass, for she was the first guest he had received in his hermitage, and to whom he had dispensed hospitality.

"Oh! sir," she said, rather pained, "you needed that wine, after your fatigue, much more than I did. You look pale and tired; I am sure you needed it."

"He smiled at her earnest tone; said that he would borrow her glass; and poured himself out some wine. He then reclined back in his chair, and drank slowly, looking at her all the time.

"There are no wines like the southern wines," he said, pausing once; "so light and genial."

She shook her head in a shrewd way, that implied "I believe so;" and said aloud, "Oh! no; there are none like them."

"And I think," he resumed, at the next pause, "that this Provençal ciotat surpasses every other southern vintage."

"Do you really think so?" exclaimed Nathalie, looking delighted; "or does it only amuse you to see how foolish I can be about my poor Provence?" she added, a little doubtfully.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said he, quickly, "you are uncharitable. I give you my word that I think every thing from Provence both excellent and delightful."

He half-bent forward as he spoke, and there was such unusual warmth in his look and tone, that Nathalie blushed deeply, not knowing whether he did not mean a compliment. On reflection, she thought this very unlikely, and said, a little archly:

"The ciotat, especially."

"Yes, of course, the ciotat," he replied, laying down his empty glass, and looking rather abstracted.

"Then why not take more?" she urged; "you must be so fatigued!"

"You seem quite confident about that."

"I know it was a fatiguing and dangerous task."

"Upon my word, there was no danger."

"What, none at all?" said Nathalie, looking disappointed.

"To please you, I will admit there was a little. You evidently like the perilous."

"I like every thing resembling an adventure," she candidly replied; "every thing unlike the routine of dull, every-day life. I liked the distant danger on which I looked with a beating heart; the storm itself I liked, even when I feared it most. I like being here to-night, in this spot, looking so wild and solitary that one might fancy it lying miles away from a human dwelling. I like to sit here and watch those gloomy beeches, shedding their solemn twilight around,—to wonder, and half-shudder, at the mysterious depths beyond; and when I am most afraid, to contrast the darkness of the night without, with the warmth and cheerful light within."

She half-bent over the fire as she spoke thus, with evident enjoyment of her position. The wood burned brightly on the hearth; the night looked dark beyond, but the flame lit every thing around with its flickering yet vivid glow. A warm ray illumed the grave features of Monsieur de Sainville, as he sat on one side of the fire-place, his elbow resting on the low mantel-shelf, and fell on the animated face and bending profile of the young girl who sat opposite to him. The thunder and lightning had long ceased; but the rain still fell heavily, and the wind moaned away, with a low and lamentable sound, along the lonely avenues. There was a brief silence.

"Yes, this is indeed a solitary place," said Nathalie, speaking almost under her breath.

"Do you like solitude?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"I should not like to be alone here," was the frank reply.

"Indeed solitude is too quiet and silent a lady for you, my child," said he, kindly.

"*Mon enfant*," though by no means implying the same degree of familiarity as the English expression of "my child," is still significant of an affectionate freedom Nathalie had not expected from Monsieur de Sainville; but their acquaintance had made great progress that evening. She could not help thinking so, and looking at him a little thoughtfully. He did not notice it; for he had risen, and stood near the window, listening to the rain and wind without.

"It is scarcely raining now," he said, after a pause. "I think, Mademoiselle Nathalie, it will be best for me to go alone to the château, and send a servant to you, with a cloak, and any thing else you may need."

Nathalie did not object, but she saw Monsieur de Sainville prepare to leave her with any thing but a sense of security. This lonely spot, with its wild look-out, and the deepening gloom of night gathering around it, frightened her,—she knew not why. Still she did not like to remonstrate; but scarcely had the door closed upon him, than fear overcame shame; she left her seat, ran quickly to the door, opened it, and said, eagerly:

"I would much sooner not wait, sir;—I would much rather go with you."

"I warn you," said he, coming back, "that it will be perhaps more of an adventure than even you will like; I have already perceived several newly-born islands and various unknown seas."

"Nathalie bent forward, and cautiously put out her graceful head, for the rain had not quite ceased. The prospect was by no means cheering. Evening had set in; over a wide lawn, covered with pools of water, extended a gray and gloomy sky, in which the pale moon now shone with a dim and troubled light; between earth and heaven floated a thin white mist, which made the château, already at a sufficient distance, seem more distant still. Nathalie uttered an exclamation of dismay, He urged her not to make the attempt. She put one foot forward, took a step, and then hesitated. He thought she agreed to stay, and walked on; but she hastily descended the wooden steps, and quickly stood by his side.

"I cannot stay there alone," she said.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of the wind, of the rain,—of every thing."

He smiled, but forbore to remonstrate. He helped her to throw her scarf over her head, gave a dubious glance, which she detected, at the satin slippers, and offered her his arm. The wind was keen, and drove the rain full in Nathalie's face; but she enjoyed the struggle, laughed, and gayly shook away the glittering drops from her cheek, to which the breeze gave heightened bloom. She looked the very realization of that delightful Louisa, from whose cheek the poet longed to kiss away the mountain rains. They had not walked far, when a sudden pause occurred. She looked disconcerted, and stopped; he pretended not to see that her slipper had come off. They had not gone on five steps further, when the other slipper stuck fast in the damp earth. This time he smiled. Nathalie looked extremely provoked, and pettishly asked "if it was the slipper's fault if the earth would be damp?" to which he gravely replied, "certainly not." But when this agreeable incident had occurred a certain number of times, Nathalie lost patience, declared the slippers might remain behind if they liked, and that she could very well walk home without them.

"No, my dear child," said he, with an authoritative kindness, "you will not do this; you will go back to the little hermitage, warm yourself once more, and wait until I send you all you need."

"Very well, sir," replied Nathalie, with child-like docility, for she was touched at the good-humored and indulgent patience with which he had borne all her little caprices.

On hearing her ready assent, he praised her for being so good and docile; promised to send soon, and proceeded on his way, whilst she returned alone to the little hermitage.

CHAPTER XIII.

Nathalie pushed the door open a little, hesitatingly. There is a nameless sort of fear no argument can allay. But the place was as they had left it,—quiet and silent. The fire, however, had burned rather low; she closed the door, came forward, and stooped to arrange it. A slight sound made her raise her look with a start; the door opened slowly; a shadow darkened the floor. In the indistinct light, Nathalie perceived a man's form standing on the threshold; she concluded it was Monsieur de Sainville, who had returned for some unknown reason.

"What has happened, sir?" she asked, rising quickly; but she immediately drew back, with a faint scream, for, by the flickering firelight, she had perceived that it was not Monsieur de Sainville, but his nephew.

There was something in the sudden way in which Charles Marceau chose to appear before the lady of his thoughts, that always jarred disagreeably on her nerves, like an unexpected shock. She now stood, mute and pale, before him, with her hand laid on the table: she needed that support. He drew near the fire-place, and stooped to look at her.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu!" he exclaimed, in a tone of great surprise, "I could scarcely have hoped for this."

Nathalie looked, and felt incredulous. It was strange.

indeed, he should know of her presence there; yet she did not think he had come in by chance. She eyed him with mistrust: he stood on the spot lately occupied by his uncle; his arm rested on the mantel-shelf, and supported his head, which was partly bowed. She could not see his features; but she saw that his wet hair clung to his pale cheeks; his clothes looked heavy with rain. There was a brief silence; but ere long his low and melancholy voice addressed her:

"Believe me, I needed not this freezing silence to understand that your resentment was unabated. Oh! it is strange, it is bitter, that a deep and devoted love should win naught save such unmitigated aversion!"

He looked up, as he spoke thus, in a moved tone. Nathalie remained cold and silent. She was romantic enough in her way; yet such language found with her no sympathy. This is no uncommon case; the key with which we win, or seek to win a way to the hearts of others, is not always that which can unlock our own heart. On seeing her standing before him. cold and mute, like a marble statue, the young man could not help exclaiming, almost angrily:

"What have I done? To love you is no crime! What have I done to be thus treated?"

"May I inquire what you mean by 'thus treated?'" she dryly asked.

"You will not even read a letter, breathing only the most respectful tenderness. What could you fear from it?"

"Nothing," was the calm reply.

"Then why so cruel as to return it unread?"

"For two reasons: the first was, that the manner in which you sent that letter displeased me; the second reason was, that I held myself tacitly bound to Madame Mârceau to hold no communication whatsoever with you."

She spoke with unruffled calmness. He remained moodily silent. She quietly resumed:

"For the same reason, I shall feel deeply indebted to you, if you will be so good as to abridge this interview. I need surely not say how painful it will be to me if you remain here until the arrival of the servant, whom I expect every moment."

"Say rather that every moment of my presence here is hateful to you," he bitterly replied, for her fearless composure verging on indifference offended him deeply.

"It is at least unbecoming here, sir," she impatiently answered, annoyed at his repeated assertions of her supposed hatred.

"And why unbecoming?" he urged in the same bitter tone; "you were here alone with my uncle half an hour or more; why should it be so very unbecoming if I remain a few minutes with you?"

"You knew he was here?" exclaimed Nathalie drawing back with renewed mistrust.

"Yes, I knew it, he replied, raising his look until it met hers and remained fastened on her face, fixed and ardent; "yes, I knew it. I stood outside that window in the rain, looking at you: there is not a glance, a smile, a motion of yours during the last half-hour which I have not seen and do not remember. I strained my ear to catch the sound of your voice, when I saw your lips moving, but the wind was loud and only once could I hear; it was when you laughed. But of course it was quite natural that I should stand outside, thanking the keen night air for cooling the fever of my blood; quite natural that he who has no such fever to cool, I suppose, should be in here with you. He stood where I am standing now; you knelt there drying your hair before the fire; he could have touched it by just stretching out his hand so, yet you did not think it needful to be so very far away from him, or to stand, as you do now, behind that table, with your look on the door. He spoke coldly enough, as it seemed to me, yet you smiled, laughed, and looked joyous. You drank out of that glass; when you had done he drank out of it too, and perhaps his lips met the very place yours had touched. He went out alone, but you followed him of your own accord; he offered you his arm, you took it unhesitatingly; the ground was wet in many places; he helped you over, and you did not shrink from him. I have never so much as asked to touch the hem of your robe; and you turn from me with aversion. Why is this? why must he who cares not for them, enjoy freedoms, innocent I grant, but denied me, to whom they would be delightful?"

He spoke with rapid and jealous passion. A burning blush of anger and shame settled on Nathalie's cheek; it deepened with every word he uttered, with every image he called up.

"Sir!" said she in angry justification, "I am free with Monsieur de Sainville, because he is my host, and, I believe, my friend, and also because, as you say, he cares not for those freedoms."

"And how do you know he cares not for them?" exclaimed Charles Marceau, with all the unreasonableness and *maladresse* of genuine jealousy; "do you think he will let you see it if he does? Are you not beautiful for him as well as for any other man? or is there a spell on his eyes that he should not see it?"

"And if it were so, sir, and if he did see it," exclaimed Nathalie, speaking with unrepressed indignation, "I should still be to him all that you accurately watched and saw this evening."

"And why so?" gloomily asked Charles, "why so?"

"Because I have faith, unbounded faith in Monsieur de Sainville's honor." Her eye sparkled as she spoke, her cheeks were flushed. her lips trembled, and she pressed her clasped hands to her bosom. The young man turned very pale.

"Am I to understand," he asked in a low tone, that you mean to cast a doubt on my honor?"

"She turned quickly towards him and replied with some emotion, "no, sir; heaven forbid!"

There was something so truthful and confiding in her face at that moment, that he did not see it was only the lingering trace of her previous emotion, and he conceived a sudden hope.

"Then, since you do not mistrust me," he eagerly said; "since you are good enough to have some confidence in me, hear me, I beseech you."

Nathalie shook her head with decisive denial.

"I have heard enough." she said; "you have spoken to me as none ever spoke to me before; may I never hear such language again. Sir. it is not enough to love; there is such a thing as loving delicately; there is such a thing as not uttering language. accusations, and allusions that will make a woman blush with unmerited shame. I know," she added. noticing his darkening brow, "that this frankness offends you; yet I can retract nothing of what you have provoked me to say. You are proud—resent it; and let resentment, if you will, take the place of any other feeling—I shall not complain."

He looked at her with anger, in which blended irrepressible tenderness.

"You need not urge me to hate you," he passionately exclaimed; "I know very well I ought, and I know I shall do so, some day; but I know also, that now, do what I will, I cannot. Haughty girl! Do you know this? do you know you never look half so bewitching as when you wear that proud look and scornful smile? Do you know that your very pride wins, when seeming most to repel; that it has a charm which only draws me more irresistibly to your feet?"

But Nathalie was not touched. In vain he pleaded that his indiscreet language was only the result of passion and of a momentary and absurd jealousy; she could not forgive him the watching at the window; least of all could she forgive his construction on what he had seen. He tried to explain, and made matters worse; then he fell back on the old theme of his love, and poured forth protestation on protestation with rapid and rising eloquence; she heard him with impatience at first, and then with weariness and *ennui* on her face.

"You are not from the south, for you have a heart of ice," he at length exclaimed, with irrepressible anger; "I am made to talk of love to you. Love! you cannot love."

A rapid blush suffused Nathalie's face.

"You know nothing about it," she replied hastily.

She stood before him, her arms folded on her bossom, her face turned towards him with a haughty smile; and as she thus unhesitatingly vindicated herself from the reproach of unwomanly heartlessness cast upon her, there was in her look, in her smile, and in her bearing, a provoking sort of grace, not free perhaps from unconscious coquetry, but which was certainly feminine, and, though she knew it not, irresistibly alluring.

He had been pacing the room up and down; he stopped short to look at her; emotion succeeded anger on his features: he felt the spell; approached her, and said in a low submissive tone:

"Be merciful, then! Teach me how I can make you love me."

She had not expected he would take her words as a sort of advance; his doing so offended her. She said in a distant tone:

"As I perceive, sir, you have not the generosity to desist and leave me, do not wonder if I leave you."

But even as she spoke, a sudden change came over the saturnine features of her exacting lover: she saw him start, change color, and step back hastily, with his look fastened on the door behind her. She turned quickly round, and saw, not the expected servant, but the pale and angry face of Monsieur de Sainville, as he stood on the threshold, holding the half-open door in his hand.

He closed it; came forward and sat down by the fireside, without once looking at Nathalie, or removing his menacing glance from Charles Marceau. But the calmness of his voice, when he spoke, contrasted strikingly with the stern meaning of his face.

"Charles," said he, quietly, "what has brought you here? I thought you were in Paris."

"I have been ill, sir," replied the young man, with a confusion that soon wore off.

His uncle eyed him from head to foot with a very expressive gaze.

"I am much better now," continued his nephew; "but the doctor advised change of air—my native air, and so I came——"

"You were born and bred at Havre," coldly interrupted his uncle, "and Havre is some ten leagues off; I suppose you were on your way there, and could not resist the temptation of seeing your mother *en passant*. I need not tell you how much she will value this attention, and be pained at your ill-health"

"Sir," said the young man, coloring, "allow me to say you have no right to express these doubts. This letter, which I had written beforehand, for your persual, and which contains another letter, addressed to me by my medical attendant, ought not to be needed to convince you of the truth of my assertions."

He produced a sealed letter, and handed it to his uncle as he spoke. Nathalie could not help trying to divine the expression of Monsieur de Sainville's features, as he perused his nephew's epistle by the fire-light; that expression was easy to read—it was one of unmitigated skepticism.

"Why," said he, looking up from the paper, and glancing at Charles, "it seems that you are thereatened with consumption, whereupon this wise doctor sends you to Normandy. I should have suggested the south of France, decidedly. But even this," he added, after a slight pause, "does not explain why, instead of entering the château by the front gate, and asking to see me, you wander about the grounds, on a rainy night, with a letter for me in your pocket."

"Sir," calmly answered his nephew, "do you forget that when we parted, I pledged my word not to return without your permission?"

"I do not forget it, I assure you," was the dry reply.

"Then cease to wonder at the hesitation I felt in appearing before you. I left this afternoon the village where I am staying; the storm overtook me near Sainville; I found one of the smaller gates of these grounds open—I entered unseen; I intended spending the night in this place, and, as I felt anxious not to alarm my mother, either to wait here until you came or until I met some servant who might become my messenger to you."

"All this is plausible, Charles,—too plausible by far," quietly replied Monsieur de Sainville. "We have in France such an institution as the post-office, to which you might have confided your letter. To come here as you came was the very way to alarm your mother; to speak to a servant, the very way to let her know of your presence. You have broken your word to me, but I do not resent this half so much as your want of candor in not confessing a feeling which—you may as well know it—is your only excuse in my eyes. Why, when I asked the reason of your return, had you not the frankness to say: 'I came back here, led by a passion which wise men call folly, but which subdues the reason of the very wisest; I entered this place, not by a scarcely possible chance, but because I knew that she whom I sought was here. I blame you, Charles, for shrinking from the avowal of what most men take pride in,—passion, and its follies."

The young man colored deeply at this unexpected reproof; and Nathalie asked herself if it were indeed the grave, the cold Monsieur de Sainville who had thus spoken.

"You are severe, sir," exclaimed the young man, with ill-repressed irritation; "but ask yourself how I could confide in one whose native coldness, indifference, and rooted skepticism, in matters of the heart, I knew so well?"

A slight hectic flush crossed the pale cheek of Monsieur de Sainville. Nathalie perhaps ought not to have looked, but look she did, as if attracted by an irresistible spell; his glance met hers, and though he was a grave man, and she but a young girl, he colored, looked disconcerted, and turned his glance away; but he recovered almost immediately, and addressing his nephew, said, in his most composed tone:

"This at least is a sensible excuse; but to spare you unnecessary trouble, to render this explanation more clear and brief, I may as well inform you that you have little or nothing to disguise from me; that, attracted by the sound of voices, I returned to this place in time to overhear a warm and generous vindication of my honor drawn forth by accusations which I did not hear, for which I do not care, but the nature of which I can, by what followed, guess easily."

Charles Marceau slightly turned pale; a burning blush overspread Nathalie's face.

"Then you listened," exclaimed the young man.

"Precisely;—I listened; for a few moments, at least," very calmly returned his uncle.

"You! sir; you, a gentleman!" and the word was uttered with indignant emphasis.

"A gentleman, as you say," replied Monsieur de Sainville, looking him full and firmly in the face.

"Monsieur de Sainville," angrily cried the young man, "you told me yourself that in certain matters you would never interfere; that the authority to which I freely submitted should never extend to feelings which would render it unbearable; you have upbraided me with breach of my word; allow me to ask if you keep yours?"

Nathalie looked at Monsieur de Sainville with some alarm; but he remained quite composed, folded his arms across his breast, and eyed his nephew with a stern smile.

"Charles," said he, in his most unruffled tones, "do not talk so loud when you are in a lady's presence; and if you can, speak more sensibly when you speak to a man of the world. I say this as advice; the delusion under which you labor,—namely, that I listened to pry into your feelings, and interfere with your actions, is too absurd for me to resent it. Love where you like,—act as you like; should your conduct reach a certain point, I shall know how to throw off the responsibility of your actions. You have broken your word; mine is still, and ever will be, inviolate. No matter what I may think of what I happened to overhear this evening,—rest assured that your mother's brother will never remember it."

He uttered this with a calmness that deeply disconcerted the young man; then turned towards Nathalie, and resumed, now speaking with the ease of a man of the world, and the courtesy of a gentleman:

"It was the host and friend of Mademoiselle Montolieu, who, finding her subjected once more to an intrusion which he had hoped would never occur again whilst she resided here, heard enough to convince himself that the conversation was on her part a most involuntary one, and came forward when it was his evident duty to interfere."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu is fortunate in such guardianship," bitterly said Charles.

"Yes, sir, Mademoiselle Montolieu is very fortunate, indeed," quickly replied Nathalie, going up, involuntarily perhaps, to Monsieur de Sainville's chair as she spoke, and thence looking at Charles with a little indignant air.

The child-like warmth and action made Monsieur de Sainville smile; he raised his look, eyed her with a slow and silent gaze, then turned once more towards his nephew, and said, in a much milder tone:

"I think, Charles, we have had enough of explanations. For the sake of a passion there is so much to justify, I overlook the fact that you have broken, or almost broken your word to me. For the same reason, I will endeavor to forget that you have presumed to intrude upon a young lady residing under my roof, consequently under my express protection. But let such an occurrence never take place again."

This sudden and unexpected leniency surprised the young girl; but Charles Marceau looked dark and moody. His uncle resumed:

"With regard to the authority you have allowed me over you—I need not remind you that it was not of my own seeking—you shall be released from it the moment you wish."

He spoke rather more coldly now; but Charles had once more become quite cool and collected: he gravely replied,

"I may have spoken hastily, sir, but I do not think I have expressed that desire."

"I suppose you do not object to return to Paris immediately?"

"I shall do so."

"Then I believe," observed Monsieur de Sainville, rising, "that there is no more to say."

"Uncle," said the young man, stepping forward, and, for the first time addressing his relative thus: "Allow me to say a few words to Mademoiselle Montolieu, before she goes."

"No, no," hastily said Nathalie, drawing closer to Monsieur de Sainville, as if fearing he would leave her alone with his nephew; "you have nothing to say, sir,—I have nothing to hear."

"I meant in the presence of my uncle," said the young man, looking much mortified.

"Will you not hear what he has to say?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

She hesitated; but sat down, in token of compliance.

Monsieur de Sainville drew away a few steps; Charles confronted them both.

"Uncle," said he, quietly, "allow me first to ask you a question. You know that I love this young lady, who seemed so indignant at the idea of remaining a few seconds alone with me: do you believe my affection sincere and true?"

"And pray," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with haughty surprise, "how should I know the nature of your affection?"

"Because you can distinguish between the truth and the mockery of passion," replied his nephew, with a fixed look; "because, if report speaks true, you once loved, yourself—ay, and loved so deeply, as not to care to love again."

Nathalie's head was resting on her hand; but she looked up very suddenly. Monsieur de Sainville saw her not—his face was pale and rigid with astonished passion; his blue eyes, generally as calm as the surface of deep, but unstirred waters, now shone with angry light. He made an effort to be composed, and merely said, in a low tone, "Charles!"

"Yes, sir, I know," returned the young man, "I know I am recalling the memory of a bitter past; but you have humbled me—you have made me look like a child found at fault, unworthy of serious reproof—chid for awhile, and forgiven. Think of the time when you loved as I love, and wonder not if I feel reckless."

Monsieur de Sainville looked keenly at Charles. The wrathful expression of his face gradually subsided, until it wholly vanished, and yielded to a sort of calm surprise, perhaps at his nephew's daring, perhaps at his own easily-moved anger; but of a surprise in which there blended at least a certain degree of admiration.

"I rather like daring," he said, at length; "but it is a sharp weapon to handle. Do not repeat this evening's experiment. Who knows whether it would succeed a second time? Yet say what you have to say freely. You seem to think I have slighted you, in a manner and in a presence which made the slight doubly keen; for what man but wishes to be honored and esteemed by the woman he admires and loves? If I have done so, I have indeed wronged you;—speak out, and prove it."

He spoke thus himself, with the firm and manly dignity of one who loved to assert his own strong will; but made not himself its slave, nor that of any passion, however subtle the disguise of right and justice it might wear.

Nathalie looked at him with sympathetic admiration. She had not that inflexible conscientious judgment,—that calm will, ever ready to act, guide, or restrain, with scarce the seeming of an effort; but she admired these qualities with the superstitious reverence which the inexperienced mariner feels for the pilot who guides his barque through foaming breaker and stormy wave, and leads it thence, with calm eye and ever steady hand, into the broad still waters. She liked courage and energy, too; and could not help casting on Charles Marceau a glance more kindly than any he had yet won from her. But the young man seemed already to repent the bold language which had led to all this. He stood before his uncle, in an attitude between hesitation, doubt, and surprise, half shunning Monsieur de Sainville's steady glance, and looking not unlike a wary archer, who for once has overshot his mark, and coolly meditates a surer aim.

"Uncle," he slowly said, "I never accused you of wronging me. I spoke, indeed, under the influence of strong emotion, else I should not have recalled to your memory a painful past."

"Then he is not so daring after all," thought Nathalie, rather scornfully, and true to the feminine instinct of admiring courage, whether moral or physical. Yet she wronged the young man. Whatever his faults might be, he was no coward. But love was not his only aim in life; he had another mistress besides Nathalie to please; one whose favor he prized no less than hers, and sought not with less patient eagerness—Ambition. His uncle could do much to make that proud lady gracious; and Charles knew it.

"Then what do you want of me?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

He spoke sharply, and looked almost disappointed at this sudden calming down from audacity to prudence.

"Nothing," respectfully replied his nephew, "save that you would help to efface an impression you have helped to produce."

"I have agreed to forward your views in life; but not, I think, your affairs of the heart," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with ill-concealed irony. "Still, if you think me bound to do so in justice——"

"In generosity," interrupted Charles.

"Or if you think I can serve in such matters, why then be it so."

"Then since you do not object," composedly said Charles.

"Object!" asked his uncle, with a peculiar smile, "why should I?"

"I will request your opinion and advice."

"Opinion and advice!" echoed Monsieur de Sainville; "I never ask or take, and rarely give either; but if you value mine, you are welcome to them."

He sat down as he spoke thus, with evident carelessness, as if the passing interest he had for a moment felt were now suddenly gone. Nathalie, surprised and hurt that he should so readily agree to interfere in this matter, gave him a half-offended look, but he did not heed it. He sat back in his chair, half-reclining, with arms folded, look sedate, and in an attitude of cold and negligent dignity. He seemed like one who may lend himself to the common uses of daily life, but who never forgets that his realm and province lie far beyond, —where?—within himself, perchance.

There was in all this something so indifferent and so haughty, that, for a moment, Nathalie thought, almost angrily, "Why, who, and what is that man, that he should set himself above such things, or make himself so much of a ruler and a king?"

"Well," said he, very quietly, "you do not speak, Charles?"

The young man was looking at Nathalie with a half-entreating, half-watchful look, as if bidding her note the words he was going to utter—the reply they would win.

Monsieur de Sainville raised his head, followed the direction of his nephew's look, smiled, resumed his old attitude, and said, "I am waiting."

"Why not *we* are waiting: it would be more royal a great deal," indignantly thought the young girl.

Monsieur de Sainville noticed her flushed face, and quietly asked if she found the room too close. Nathalie, a little disconcerted, did not answer. Charles, whose pause was not one of hesitation, but of thought, now spoke:

"Sir, do you believe in my attachment for Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

"Certainly," was the calm reply.

"Do you object to that attachment?"

"Object to it! no; why should I?"

"Do you approve it?" He spoke low, but with a fixed look. Monsieur de Sainville returned the glance, and said, very calmly:

"To approve would be to admit that I have a right to object. My guardianship over either you or Mademoiselle Montolieu extends not so far."

"May I know, uncle, in what light you view that attachment?" placidly urged Charles.

"As a thing that concerns me not," frigidly replied his uncle; "my only concern in this matter is to see that Mademoiselle Montolieu is not annoyed: you may feel what you like."

"But you do not object to it?" said Charles, again.

"No," again replied his uncle, smiling, as if he had no difficulty in understanding why Charles persisted in his question.

The young man looked at Nathalie; there was something of triumph in his look, which brought a more scornful light to her eyes. She understood, and resented his meaning.

"Uncle," resumed Charles, once more addressing his relative, "allow me now to ask your advice. When a man loves a woman, and is so unfortunate as not to be able to convince her of his affection, what can he do?"

"Persist or desist,—just as he chooses," dryly replied Monsieur de Sainville.

"But what do you advise me to do?" persisted Charles.

"Convince Mademoiselle Montolieu, if you can, Charles; and if you cannot, do not torment her."

"But you advise me to convince her, if I can," urged Charles.

"By all means," was the unhesitating reply.

"And you do not object to my passion?"

"No," impatiently answered his uncle.

Nathalie colored and looked offended. Charles turned towards her; his look was downcast; his voice measured and low.

"Mademoiselle," said he calmly, "you were good enough on my uncle's solicitation to agree to listen to me. It may be long before we meet again: you have refused to hear me alone: you know what I feel for you; allow me to ask if I may hope?"

Nathalie did not answer. He repeated his question, still she gave him no reply. A third time he asked.

"May I hope?"

She looked up, and said quietly.

"You may hope, sir, since you call it so, or not hope—just as you please. I have nothing to do with either feeling."

"Is this scorn?" he asked, turning pale.

"No, sir, by no means," she answered with something like gentleness; "it is simply that you have asked me a question you have no right to ask."

"Uncle," exclaimed Charles, "I appeal to you; was my question fair?"

"I am no arbiter in this case," replied Monsieur de Sainville, speaking very coldly.

"In the name of justice, sir, I conjure you to answer me: was that question a fair question?"

"I think it was a fair question," gravely replied Monsieur de Sainville, thus adjured.

"I deny it, I deny it," exclaimed Nathalie rising as she spoke, looking indignantly at Monsieur de Sainville, and haughtily at his nephew; "I deny it, and since you will have the truth, sir,—why, you may hear it. I refuse to answer, because I do not think that words and protestations give a claim to the attention, which is implied by the fact of answering. When a man has proved the truth and courage of his affection, when though he shall not win love, he may at least compel esteem and respect, then perhaps, but not till then, he may ask a plain question, and expect a plain reply. Mind, sir, I do not accuse you; I merely say that I know you not."

Charles said nothing, but he evidently chafed inwardly. Monsieur de Sainville, who had been observing Nathalie's changing face with some attention, now observed with a smile that seemed to imply he was not indifferent to the perverse pleasure of provoking her a little further:

"Pray do not imagine I meant you were bound to reply, but allow me to ask if you do not take too rigid and exclusive a view of so important a question. Proofs! What man can give proofs of mere feelings? What woman is sufficiently impartial to test the proofs when given? Would it not be safer to go at once on the principle of believing in the affection professed?"

"Sir," said Nathalie turning towards him with a kindling look, "allow me to say you evidently do not understand either this subject or me."

"Indeed!" he interjected, looking rather amused.

"Yes, indeed," she echoed; "you seem to think I am guided by prudence; I am not, sir; I am guided by pride."

"Pride is a dangerous guide, Mademoiselle Montolieu," he observed with a smile.

"But at least frank and true," she replied, with some energy. "Sir, men have many ways of vindicating their honor and asserting their dignity,—woman but one. I am—whatever my station may be—a woman, and I will exact as much observance and respect as any great lady; neither poverty nor obscure birth shall make me 'bate one atom of my pride. Monsieur Marceau is free to carry his affections elsewhere; if he wishes to know my mind, he shall bide my pleasure and my time. I will not admit that, for having spoken to me three times—every time against my will—one, of whom I otherwise know nothing, has a claim to a serious reply, or a right to be heard. Women are surely not so cheap that such mere attentions should make a man win or lose them!"

She spoke with all the eloquent rapidity of southern vehemence, without a second's pause or a moment's hesitation.

"I believe, Charles," quietly said Monsieur de Sainville, that this is decisive."

"Decisive!" echoed the young man, in a tone of subdued irritation; "how so? If Mademoiselle Montolieu has refused to say 'hope,' she has not said 'do not hope.' Why, then, should I not, as you yourself advised me, sir, seek to convince and change her."

"Provided she permits your attentions," coldly said his uncle.

"No, no," quickly exclaimed Nathalie; "I do not,—I will not."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Charles, in a low tone, "this is strange and contradictory. You exact proofs, and then refuse them. Shall I ask if you are capricious?"

"And shall I ask, sir, if you are free to give those proofs?" coldly replied Nathalie. "I speak not in a spirit of recrimination," she added, more gently, as she saw him change color. "I might have alluded to this before, but I thought it more just and generous to consider the offer of your affection in itself, and without reference to circumstances over which you had no control. But though I reproach you not for that which is no fault of yours, wonder not if I decline attentions your mother would oppose or resent, and to accept which would imply, on my part, either the meanest perfidy or the most heroic patience, as I chose to deceive or brave her. Perfidious I never will be; and patient, sir, you know well enough that I am not."

The young man did not answer. What could he say? His uncle rose, walked up to Nathalie, and laying his hand gently on her arm, said to his nephew, eyeing him steadily as he spoke:

"Charles, you love this young girl. I do not blame you; and if, spite of all the obstacles which rise against your passion, you choose to persist, why, then, love on, and run your chance. Fortune may end by befriending you. But, in the mean time, do not forget this: through your own imprudence, this same young girl has become my guest; she is under the shield of my roof, name, and honor. You have yourself heard her accepting this guardianship, which shall only be to protect, and never to control her. I shall, therefore, no more permit an intrusion on her privacy than if she were my sister or my child. Feel as you like, and as much as you like; but confine yourself to feeling. Should any thing like what has happened this evening occur again, I warn you that I shall not be so easily appeased; but that I shall resent it as much, and precisely in the same way, as if we were the merest strangers, without one drop of the same blood." He spoke imperatively, and looked almost stern; but, as if repenting this, he resumed, in his usual tone: "I speak thus to warn, not to threaten. I have faith in your good sense and honor."

Thus saying, he quietly passed the unresisting arm of Nathalie within his own, and left the hermitage.

The young man did not reply. His face was pale; his lips were compressed. He walked up to the door, and stood there montionless. His moody and abstracted glance long followed the two forms, now slowly vanishing in the evening obscurity.

CHAPTER XIV.

The walk home was silent. The rain had ceased; Monsieur de Sainville led his companion by the terraces; it was the longer but also the dryer way. Once when they came to a pool of water, visible by the faint and trembling moonlight, he lifted her over it with as little hesitation and as much ease as if she were a child. She gave him a half-offended look, but on seeing how abstracted he looked, and how little he evidently thought of the cause of her displeasure, she had discretion enough to feel that it would be better not to seem offended. She did not speak until they entered the lime-tree avenue.

"Where are we going, sir?" she then asked.

"To the library, unless you object. There is a private staircase by which you can go up to your own room at once. It is therefore shorter than to go by the front entrance."

Nathalie by no means objected. She had now been out several hours; her long absence would be thought strange; the sooner she could change her attire and make her appearance, the better.

It was Monsieur de Sainville's habit to have every room devoted to his separate use lit at a certain hour, whether he was present or not.

He disliked to repeat the same orders evening after evening; indeed, whenever he took a new servant he gave him a concise and exact account of his duties; informing him that this account was given once for all, that he consequently hoped not to be under the necessity of having to repeat it; and, thanks to the quiet authority of his manner, the necessity rarely occurred. It was owing to this peculiarity that Nathalie now found the library quite solitary, but in a brilliant state of illumination. A large lamp shed its light on the table; and waxlights, which had been burning for some time in silver sconces hanging against the walls, filled the place with their clear pale ray.

No spot of a room where Monsieur de Sainville chose to be, was to remain in inconvenient obscurity. Few men cared so little for the more delicate luxuries of life, but few, also, made every thing within their sphere and power so subservient to their will as he did to his.

"That man turns the very lights into his obedient slaves," thought Nathalie, a little indignantly. A rapid look, given whilst Monsieur de Sainville closed the door, had sufficed her to observe all this, and to comment upon it inwardly. As he came forward she remembered, and looked for, the private staircase he had mentioned, but looked in vain; she could only see two doors, that by which they had just entered, and that which led to the hall. Sign of other egress there was none. She looked puzzled and he amused.

"I see," said he, "that you are impatient to go; but we cannot part thus. You are a little vexed with me, are you not?"

He spoke with a smile which displeased Nathalie, and made her look as she felt; but he was one to bear a lady's displeasure with equal composure and courtesy, and still waited her answer. She hesitated—then replied with sudden promptness:

"Yes, sir, I am vexed with you."

He looked more amused than alarmed, and said quietly:

"Pray, what have I done?"

She remained silent.

"You will not tell me my offence?"

No reply.

"What! not even a hint?"

She looked up and eyed him very composedly.

"I will tell you, sir," she said, "if you will only assure me that you do not know or guess."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he replied, in a tone of feeling reproach, "this answer does not sound like yours, for it is not quite frank; there is a decided air of Norman and legal ambiguousness about it: however, it implies so flattering a belief in my veracity that I know not how to complain. You are vexed with me because I spoke as I did, and yet I scarcely regret it; for had I not spoken so, I should not know with how much spirit, courage, and frankness, a young girl could assert the privileges and dignity of her sex."

He spoke quite seriously now; he spoke too in words of praise, rare at any time from his lips, and for the first time addressed to Nathalie by him. She felt moved, but did not reply; he resumed in his old manner:

"Pray let us be friends; it is unnatural for guardian and ward to quarrel."

"Unnatural!" said Nathalie, half turning round with a demure smile; "why all the old plays and tales I ever read ran on the quarrels of guardians and wards."

"But we will do better."

"Yes, much better. Besides, guardians in those times seem to have been peevish and so old."

"Then we are friends?" he said again, without seeming to heed this remark.

She smiled and spontaneously held out her hand in token of reconciliation. He took it, and looked at her, with smiling kindness, as a father might look at his child.

"Poor little thing!" he said, at length, when she began to wonder at his silence; "I dare say you have not many friends here?"

"Two," she answered,

"Two!" said he, surprised; "I thought you had only your sister."

She too looked surprised.

"And my guardian," she said, half in jest—half in earnest

He looked at her; she colored involuntarily, and without knowing why; something like a sudden cloud passed across his brow; he did not drop her hand, but his hold relaxed; she wished to withdraw it, for she had an uncomfortable sensation of having gone too far; but he detained it firmly within his, and said, very seriously:

"Yes, you have two friends."

He let her hand go, went to the library, and touched a spring: one of the compartments, which Nathalie had thought to be filled with books, opened, and disclosed steep and narrow steps, winding away into deepening gloom. He stood below, holding the lamp, whilst she went up; she was light and agile, and reached the top of the staircase without one false step; there a door, which yielded to her touch, admitted her into the long passage, at the end of which stood her own room. She remembered having heard Aunt Radegonde say that the door facing this led to one of the turrets—no doubt that of Monsieur de Sainville. This accounted for his being so seldom met or seen in the other parts of the château.

She had soon changed her dress; but as she smoothed her hair, she suddenly missed a narrow velvet, which she wore bound several times around her head, according to the fashion of the period. This velvet, a present from Aunt Radegonde, worn that day for the first time, was, unfortunately, distinguished by a little silver edge. She concluded she had left it in the hermitage.

"*Allons!*" she impatiently thought; "I hope to keep all this quiet; but I suppose that the first servant who goes in there to-morrow morning will know of my presence, thanks to that velvet and its silver edge."

She felt provoked, and then pride asked, "Why should she care?" and bade her go down quite composedly to the drawing-room.

Madame Marceau sat in majestic state, with her pile of cushions behind and around her, and something of haughtiness in the very way in which her feet rested on a broad stool. With her shawl, her silks, her sparkling jewels, and her dark face, on which the light of the lamp now shone full and clear, she looked like a handsome eastern despot. Nathalie paused near the door, to look at the haughty lady.

"When will that woman wish me to be her daughter?" she thought, remembering what had passed that same evening.

She slowly came forward, and silently took her usual seat. How much had occurred since he had left that drawing-room a few hours before! Madame Marceau was not alone; her friend partly reclined on a low couch, where, with her indolent attitude and half-closed eyes, she looked like a languid sultana, as calm and apathetic as the other was active and restless. They were engaged in earnest conversation, that is to say, Madame Marceau spoke, and Madame de Jussac put in a word now and then. The accident and its consequences, which had apparently extended much farther up the river, occupied them exclusively.

"Deplorable!" exclaimed Madame Marceau; "ten families ruined; we must, of course, do something for these people."

"Are they Monsieur de Sainville's tenants?" asked Madame de Jussac.

"No, they are not on our land; but we are not the less bound to come to their aid. Mademoiselle Montolieu, Madame de Jussac says you remained out; I hope you did not get wet. *Ma chère*," she added, without waiting for Nathalie's reply, "what do you say to a lottery?"

"Excellent!" was the calm answer.

"Excellent, as you say." From that moment the idea of the lottery seemed to occupy her exclusively.

Madame de Jussac turned towards Nathalie, and quietly asked if she had remained out in the rain, and got very wet?

"Not very wet," replied Nathalie, much disturbed.

It did not add to her composure to perceive that Madame de Jussac's slow, but attentive look, was scanning her change of dress.

"You must have found a convenient shelter," she observed, in her languid way; "I never saw such heavy rain: you were surely not out all the time?"

Nathalie bent over her work, without answering: indeed, Madame Marceau gave her no time to do so. Her own impression was, that Nathalie had kept away from the drawing-room through a very proper sense of discretion; where and how she had spent that evening, was a minor point, in which she took not the least interest. She now engaged her inquisitive friend in so close a conversation on the proposed lottery; its probable results; the prizes to be drawn; the tickets to be placed, and other such questions, that Madame de Jussac had not the opportunity of renewing her inquiries.

About half an hour had elapsed, when the door opened, and Monsieur de Sainville entered. He took no notice of Nathalie, and sat at the end of the table farthest from that where she worked, near the two ladies. The ruined families, the lottery, and Madame de Jussac, were immediately forgotten for "dear Armand, his heroism," and so forth. "Had he got wet? he must be chilly?—could nothing be done?"

Madame Marceau's Armand heard her, and replied, with evident, though repressed impatience. Nathalie took a mischievous pleasure in noticing how he fretted internally beneath his sister's praise, and the word of quiet eulogy which Madame de Jussac put in now and then.

At length both ladies desisted; but first Madame Marceau adroitly dropped the word "lottery."

"A lottery—what for?" he promptly asked.

"For those poor ruined families, Armand. As she spoke, Madame Marceau looked anxiously at her brother. Nathalie, who had formerly heard him mention this not very elevated sort of charity in terms of contemptuous pity, expected some objection, but he only looked thoughtful, and said nothing.

"Yes," gayly continued his sister, interpreting his silence into approval; "a lottery we must have. Mademoiselle Nathalie,"—on hearing herself thus familiarly addressed, the young girl perceived that the lady was in high good humor; "Mademoiselle Nathalie, I claim a purse of your work, at the very least; you, *ma chère*, have already pledged yourself to the contribution of I know not how many charming things; my aunt must give us some *chef-d'œuvre* in the knitting way. Do not think to escape, Armand; you have brought back too many delightful curiosities from your wanderings, not to have a few to spare for the sake of charity."

"True; but I will give you a greater curiosity by far—good advice."

Madame Marceau coughed, and looked annoyed.

"Well, Armand," she said, with a constrained smile, "let us hear this good advice."

"In the first place, how many tickets do you mean to issue?"

"Two or three thousand: less will not do."

"How will you dispose of them?"

"Madame de Jussac has very kindly offered to dispose of half the number issued."

"But how will you dispose of the other thousand or fifteen hundred?"

Madame Marceau's brow darkened: this was a sensitive point. She had been so long buried in *bourgeois* obscurity, and her brother cared so little for society, that her circle of acquaintance was as yet very narrow. This was a matter in which she could not think of imposing on Madame de Jussac, on whose lips she now detected a smile of careless triumph

Thanking her brother very little for this exposure, she coldly replied,

"I really do not know."

He smiled in a very provoking manner, as if rather pleased than otherwise at having thrown cold water on his sister's schemes. Such, at least, was Nathalie's charitable conclusion as she looked up from her work, and attentively watched his face. She sat rather in the shade, and he at the other end of the table, in the circle of light shed by the lamp.

"We must have less tickets, I suppose," said Madame Marceau, in a vexed tone.

"Impossible," quietly replied her brother; "the damage done, as you say, is great. The produce of the lottery must be worth offering."

"Which means that I had better give it up," observed the lady, rather indignantly; "is that your 'good advice,' Armand?"

"By no means," he replied, smiling again, "I have only pointed out the difficulty; I am going to deliver you from it now. The lottery is evidently insufficient; but on the day when it is to take place, throw open the grounds to the good people of Sainville,—not the garden, for to that I have a decided objection. Give them a little *fête champêtre*, with a dance on the lawn; let the price of entrance not be too high,—*bourgeois* are sparing of their money. Many will come, and the produce of both fête and lottery will, I am sure, cover all the losses these poor people have sustained."

Madame Marceau heard her brother with a triumphant surprise she took great pains to conceal from the languid look of her friend. But, spite of all she could do, her haughty face was flushed, and her dark eyes kindled, as she listened to this solution of the difficulty. The sister of Monsieur de Sainville knew she could not be a political lady, on the legitimate side, at least, like Madame de Jussac, who guided all the intrigues of the district; for her friend was a Countess, and she was unfortunately the widow of a merchant; besides, her brother, through whom she might have been something, professed a profound indifference for every political party. She could not be a graceful and accomplished lady of the world, for she had no high connections, and would not stoop to second-rate ones. But she could be a popular lady,—the lady of Sainville. Abroad she had many rivals, but none at home, and like Cæsar, she loved where she did rule to rule alone. The suggestions of her brother fell on her ear like the realization of her long-cherished and ambitious dreams She beheld the fête in anticipation; she saw herself the queen of the day, sailing through respectful crowds, polite to a select few, gracious to all, and patronizing *bourgeois* and shopkeepers to her haughty heart's content. Nay, she could not help remembering that the elections were at hand; if Armand would only consent to become a candidate, let himself be elected, and agree to take his seat as deputy? He could if he would; then why should he not? She fastened her dark, stealthy eyes on her brother, and eagerly scanned that face, so pale and severe, which ever seemed to baffle the scrutiny it irresistibly attracted. Why had he, who by no means professed himself to be a philanthropist, been so zealous in saving the paltry crops of still more paltry villagers? Why had he, who despised the surreptitious charity of lotteries, so readily agreed to hers? Why had he, who was so jealous of his privacy and solitude, offered to open his luxurious and carefully-guarded grounds to the prying gaze and obtrusive presence of paying guests? Why was all this? Was it the result of some deep and secret scheme? Did he, who chose to appear so skeptical and so indifferent, long in his heart for political power,—that passion of man's noon-day life? She scarcely hoped so, and yet it would be strange indeed if he,—still in all the fulness and vigor of existence,—had not even a desire to fulfil or an aim to pursue. But, far as her thoughts had wandered, the cautious lady knew how to seem not to have for one instant forgotten the lottery and the proposed fête.

"Your advice is good, Armand," she smilingly said, "but expensive."

"This objection was intended to blind Madame de Jussac, who was to conclude that her friend had been engaged in economical calculations. Monsieur de Sainville looked surprised.

"I dare say you will not mind either trouble or expense incurred for the sake of a good deed," he replied.

"I see he is willing to pay, but will not appear in the matter," she thought. "What if we have the fête without the dancing?" she again objected, now speaking aloud.

"By no means," he very quickly said; "without the dancing! Why, Rosalie, half the people would not come."

"Oh! proud brother of mine. you, too, have set your heart on popularity and power?" inwardly exclaimed Madame

Marceau, looking at him with secret triumph, and already beholding herself in Paris, the centre of a political coterie in her brother's hôtel, whilst Charles went off as attaché d'ambassade with his Excellency, no matter who.

"I give in," she said aloud, as if she had all this time been engaged in some economical struggle; "and sincerely thank my dear brother for his judicious advice."

"Then I shall test your gratitude," he replied, "by requesting that you will take on yourself the sole management of every thing, and for once allow me to drop the character of host and become your guest."

Madame Marceau dilated with triumph.

The struggle had been long; but her brother acknowledged her power; there was sweetness in this tardy victory. She felt happy, elated, and glanced with secret exultation at Madame de Jussac, who, in her placid way, had already chosen to drop a few hints concerning Monsieur de Sainville's singular strength of character. But the lady was not at that moment looking towards her; she was amusing herself with watching Nathalie, opposite whom her sofa lay. On the first mention of the fête, the young girl had laid down her work on her lap and listened attentively: but, as the discussion continued, and the plan matured, she gradually and unconsciously edged her chair round so as to face the speakers. Now she was sitting with both her arms resting and folded on the table, half-bent forward with eager look and parted lips, in an attitude of breathless attention.

"I know who will dance at the fête," said Madame de Jussac, with a smile, thus drawing attention to the young girl.

Nathalie, who had remained wholly unconscious of observation, started, colored, hung down her head, and pretended to be looking for her work. Vain attempt at composure! When she looked up, her face was radiant, her eyes danced with delight, and irrepressible smiles played around her demurely closed lips.

"Do you care about dancing?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, looking at her for the first time since his entrance.

"Yes, sir, I like it," she replied, a little mortified to find he had so soon forgotten their conversation in the hermitage

"Then I promise you that you shall not miss one quadrille,' observed Madame Marceau, now in her most amiable mood. "Come, *ma chère*, when shall it be?"

Madame de Jussac, thus addressed, replied calmly; but her friend was in high spirits, and went on arranging and projecting for an hour and more. Then, however, a sudden silence fell on the whole party. Monsieur de Sainville looked grave, almost moody; Madame Marceau thought him absorbed by the coming meeting, and she already revelled in the imagined triumphs of the *grande dame populaire*, and of the political woman. Nathalie worked on in silence, and looked very serious, but all the time a bright vision floated before her: she saw a gay dance on the green; she heard the merry music—merry even to those who care little for dancing—of galop, waltz, and quadrille. Madame de Jussac looked on through her half closed eyes, and drew her own conclusions from all she saw, until the party separated at a later hour than usual.

The week which this lady spent at the château, was not productive in incident. Madame Marceau, though affecting familiarity, and calling her *ma chère*, *ma bonne*, and *ma belle*, to show that they were old friends—they had known one another in childhood—was in evident awe of her quiet guest, and submitted to all her opinions and decisions in matters of worldly knowledge. Aunt Radegonde, without speaking too openly, gave broad hints to Nathalie about people who made one feel chill and uncomfortable. Monsieur de Sainville looked more cold and haughty than he had ever looked.

Nathalie soon noticed a tacit sort of quarrel was continually going on between him and his sister's friend. At first, the lady enveloped him in a soft silken net of the most subtle courtesy and grace. It was flattery so delicate, that no man could possibly resent it, and then succeeded a constant instinctive sort of appealing to his opinion and judgment, that was far more flattering than mere speech; but in an unlucky hour Madame de Jussac said something about politics, and confessed the warm interest she felt in the elder Bourbons. Nathalie saw Monsieur de Sainville smile, as if he now understood why he had been so perseveringly courted, and from that moment the quarrel began. Of course, it was a polite, well-bred, smiling quarrel; politics formed the ostensible theme, but perhaps politics had in reality little to do with it. There might be such a thing as piqued *amour-propre* on one side, and ironical resentment on the other.

It was, perhaps, for the charitable purpose of punishing Monsieur de Sainville, who now scarcely noticed the young girl, that Madame de Jussac suddenly took a great fancy to her, and almost exclusively engaged her company; he certainly did not appear to view their intimacy with pleasure; but Nathalie, piqued at his coldness, did not care. She was young, frank as her years, and she yielded freely to the insinuating grace which no one knew better how to exercise than Madame de Jussac.

At the end of a week the lady left, promising to come back for the *fête*. After her departure, matters resumed their old course at the château. Madame Marceau moved about once more with authoritative air and speech; Aunt Radegonde was garrulous and cheerful; and Nathalie felt that the change gradually vanished from the manner of Monsieur de Sainville.

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CHAPTER XV.

For the next fortnight, the château was kept in a constant state of bustle and preparation by Madame Marceau de Sainville, as she now began to be called. The little town echoed with her praises, and the rumor of her charity and munificence spread wherever the tidings of the disaster, which she thus generously sought to repair, had penetrated.

Whilst she disposed of tickets, gave orders, made purchases, and saw to every thing, Nathalie and the Canoness worked together in the boudoir or in the garden. Aunt Radegonde, in her zeal, nearly knitted herself ill; Nathalie was fully as industrious. This busy fortnight, with its day of pleasure still in view, delighted her. The time passed lightly. At night she dreamt of endless dancing on the lawn; and all day long she worked at various articles of fancy work, destined for the lottery, and of which Madame Marceau provided the materials. To the annoyance of his aunt, "who, not being inquisitive, would not have given a pin to know," Monsieur de Sainville declined exhibiting his contributions to the general fund, and took it on himself to criticize very freely the various articles manufactured by his aunt and Nathalie. He said the flimsy counterpane could give no warmth; censured the cobweb mittens; pronounced the opera-caps unbecoming; and so much irritated the little Canoness, that she told him roundly "he could not do so much, were he to try ever so long,"—a fact he willingly granted. Nathalie's productions fared still worse. He held up her embroidered bag to ridicule; declared that her cigar-case was such as no man of sense would use; but chiefly derided a little round silk purse, with a silver clasp, which she was knitting, and which was destined to hold a Napoleon, or the change of one. This he declared it could not. Nathalie, piqued in her *amour-propre*, insisted that it could The contest lasted until the purse was finished; her host then tested its merits, in the presence of Nathalie, to whose indelible disgrace it was found totally deficient. Aunt Radegonde warmly took the part of her young friend, who, as she always said, "was too meek, poor little thing! to defend herself properly;" an sssertion which, though too polite to contradict, her nephew always heard with his skeptical smile.

At length the great day came, and a lovely day it was,—clear, bright, and sunny. The grounds were not to be thrown open until three in the afternoon; and at three precisely, Nathalie ran down to the drawing-room to find the Canoness, whom she had vainly sought for in her boudoir. She opened and closed the door with a sort of unnecessary vivacity, which characterized her least motions, and came running in, exclaiming, in a light, cheerful voice:

"Are you here, Marraine? I am quite ready."

She looked around: the Canoness was sitting in her armchair, dressed in gray silk, and with a profusion of rich laces, that gave costliness to her otherwise simple attire. She eyed the young girl from head to foot with a critical glance, and smiled approvingly. Nathalie was, however, very simply dressed in a clear white muslin, whose light folds fell down to her feet; a black lace mantilla, worn at the back of her head, and falling down on her neck, and black net mittens, half-covering her bare arms, gave her something of a Spanish air. The Canoness, pleased to see her looking so well, completed her costume by presenting her with an elegant little fan, to be worn suspended at the wrist by a slender jet chain.

"Do you know how to use it?" she asked, helping her to fasten it on.

Nathalie began fanning herself with assumed awkwardness.

"No, Petite, not so;—look at me;" and taking her own fan, she used it with slow and stately grace; for Aunt Radegonde, having lived in the days when fanning was in all its glory, piqued herself on possessing the traditions of that well nigh lost art.

"Yes, it is already better," she added, as Nathalie made another attempt; "but you do it too fast—try again; walk up and down the room, fan yourself, and look as Spanish as you can."

Nathalie laughed, and complied. She paced the drawing-room to and fro, assuming that peculiar gait which is said to characterize the women of Spain, and fanning herself with southern ease and vivacity. As every now and then she glanced over her shoulder at the Canoness, with half-mocking, half-alluring grace, she looked like one of those lovely, but far too earthly saints, such as the old Spanish masters delighted to paint from living models, suddenly stepped down, in all the warm coloring and vividness of life, from her gloomy canvas and tarnished frame, to bewitch poor mortals from their devotions. All this she did with the coquetry innate in southern women. a coquetry nothing can subdue—most provoking and yet ever irresistible, because frank, genuine, and without disguise. But Nathalie suddenly stopped short in her promenading; she dropped her fan—it would have fallen to the floor, but for the little jet chain—and looked transfixed. She had perceived Monsieur de Sainville, unseen till then, standing in the embrasure of one of the windows, with a newspaper in his hand; he seemed absorbed in his reading; probably he had not noticed her—she devoutly hoped so, on remembering how freely she had been displaying her graces. She gave the Canoness a look of silent reproach.

"Petite," suddenly asked Aunt Radegonde, withot heeding this, "why do you not wear the velvet I gave you?"

"I have lost it," was the embarrassed reply.

"Lost it! When, and how?"

"Out—on the day of the storm."

"Petite, how could the storm make you lose it?"

"My hair got wet, and I unfastened it."

"Unfastened your hair in the storm!"

"Was there a silver edging to it?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, looking up.

"Yes; did you find it, Armand?"

"I found such a velvet."

"Where?" asked his inquisitive aunt.

Nathalie gave him an alarmed look. She knew where the velvet was lost—where she had uselessly looked for it. He smiled, and said, quietly:

"Aunt, I fear you will be angry. when I tell you that I have been using your gift to Mademoiselle Montolieu as a book-marker, and that the silver has become tarnished"

"Using Petite's velvet as a book-marker!" indignantly exclaimed his aunt.

"Well, if Mademoiselle Montolieu, wishes for it——"

"Do you imagine she is going to wear your book-marker?" hotly interrupted the Canoness.

"Aunt, I hear the music."

"And you want us to leave you to your politics?" she pettishly said.

He silently resumed his reading as they left the room.

"Oh, Marraine!" reproachfully observed Nathalie in the garden, "how could you make me go on so foolishly whilst Monsieur de Sainville was there?"

"You surely do not think he took any notice of you?" replied the Canoness, innocently looking up into her face.

"Well, but he might," answered Nathalie, coloring a little.

Petite, Armand is courteous to women, as a gentleman should be; but though he notices character, I acquit him of caring for either the dress or good looks of young girls. See, how he never knew that velvet to be yours! *A-propos*, where did you lose it?"

But they had crossed the garden, and were entering the grounds, which were already filled with guests, laughing, mirth, and music. Nathalie took advantage of this not to reply.

"*Oh! mon Dieu!* what a pretty sight!" she exclaimed, looking and feeling delighted. "How gay and cheerful those many-colored dresses look on the green! What a lovely afternoon! Why is there not a fête every day in the year? It is so pleasant to enjoy one's self and be happy."

"Petite, what are those white things there beyond?"

"Awnings, Marraine,—snow-white awnings, spreading in the cool green shade, with here and there a warm sun-ray gliding through. That little tent standing apart is for the refreshments. I ran out just before they opened the gates, to have a peep: it looked beautiful. Fruits, in all their bloom and beauty, and of every warm, sunny hue, rose in pyramids, in wide porcelain baskets, and looked almost too fresh and exquisite to touch."

"Were there any cakes or creams?" asked the Canoness, who had a spice of *gourmandise* in her composition.

"I did not mind. Cakes and creams are pretty, but not poetical."

"They are a great deal better than poetical, Was there any nougât? I like it. Let us try at once before it is all gone. Come, Petite," she added, with an air of *finesse*, "let us go to that pretty tent, take some nougât and a cream, and eat them in some quiet, shady place, far from all this noise and bustle."

Nathalie gave a wistful look at the dancers under the large awning; but there was nothing selfish, even in her most ardent longing after pleasure, and, without a murmur, she accompanied her old friend.

All the *bourgeois* of Sainville and the environs had come, with their wives and daughters, to see the grounds, to criticize what they saw, and enjoy themselves, in spite of all that. There were also a few ladies from the surrounding châteaux, and plenty of gentlemen, who thought the young *bourgeoises* very pretty, though somewhat prim and sedate.

The place was thronged; yet, thanks to the admirable instinct of French crowds, there was not the least confusion. Nathalie and her companion kept somewhat aloof, and followed a shady path, whence they could see all that passed on the lawn. The young girl several times caught a view of Madame Marceau, who sailed through the crowd with majestic grace, with a smile for some, a word to others, and to all kind glances. She felt elated, triumphant; and looked like a dark, handsome queen, imperious even in her very blandest courtesy. Nathalie could not help admiring her, and observing to her companion that Madame Marceau was a very fine woman.

"Rather too tall," replied the Canoness. "After all, my dear, it is we, and those like us, that are *the* women."

Nathalie smiled archly. She was of that elegant height to which there is nothing to add, but from which there is also nothing to take away. Aunt Radegonde, though decidedly short, labored under the agreeable delusion that her height was the standard height of woman, and used the pronoun *we* with perfect confidence. They soon reached the tent. The Canoness selected her favorite dainties, and made a servant follow them with a tray, until they reached a cool, shady nook, where they sat down at the foot of a beech, and began, as she said, "to enjoy themselves." Nathalie consoled herself by listening to the music, and now and then catching a glimpse of the dancers through the trees.

The Canoness liked to enjoy good things slowly. She was long about the nougât, and longer still about the creams

Though Nathalie remained patient and cheerful, she could not help giving an occasional look at the distant fête, and drawing to it the attention of Aunt Radegonde.

"Oh! Marraine!" she exclaimed, admiringly; "do look at those dancers there beyond. How well they keep time to the music, and sink or rise together! Dancing is beautiful; I admire it; I have always admired it; there is something in it that reminds one of astronomy."

"Astronomy, Petite?"

"Yes, indeed, for I half believe in the music of the spheres; and the harmonious motion of sun, earth, moon, and planets, with their myriads of worlds, always seemed to me like a magnificent dance on a grand scale. Comets are those erratic dancers whom neither time nor measure can keep quiet, and fixed stars are holy nuns, who have looked on from afar, and who, poor things! must still look on, throughout eternity."

"Well, Petite, you will be no fixed star by-and-by. But is it not pleasant to be sitting here in the shade, enjoying our little collation?"

Too candid to say "yes," Nathalie smiled, and the Canoness, who had some of the latent selfishness which often accompanies a certain species of good-nature, interpreted the smile as one of unequivocal assent. Their "little collation" was over, but she felt "meditative;" and in her vocabulary, to be meditative signified to be drowsy. They were sitting on a grassy slope at the foot of a large beech; she drew nearer to the trunk of the tree, and leaning against it, prepared to meditate. At first Nathalie felt dismayed. She knew that the reflective moods of Aunt Radegonde were long and deep; but it seemed a hopeless case; and so, with a sigh given to the distant dancing, she sat down by her old friend, smoothed and settled her silk skirts, and encircling her little waist with one arm, told her to take her shoulder as a pillow. After some coquetting, the Canoness accepted, and laid her head on the firm and smooth support offered to her; she looked flushed, and complained of the heat; Nathalie began fanning her softly; in less than a minute Aunt Radegonde was fast asleep.

This spot, though not far from the lawn, was both shady and retired, and no one came to disturb the two ladies. But after some minutes had elapsed, a gentleman slowly walked up the quiet path and paused, unseen and unheard, within a few paces of the beech-tree. The Canoness still slept peacefully, but her head had half-glided from the shoulder to the bosom of the young girl, who, to support her more conveniently, now leaned on one elbow, and half reclined on the grassy slope She still fanned her old friend, but slowly and abstractedly; it was evident that her thoughts were elsewhere; every now and then she started slightly as the sounds of the fête reached her ear, and her right foot, half peeping from the ample folds of her white dress, beat time to the distant music. As they both lay there together, in the cool, shady light, with many a queer depth and many a winding path around and behind them. he who gazed remembered a long-forgotten tale of his childhood, and thought that Nathalie looked not unlike the poor Princess sighing for freedom with all its joys, whilst the Canoness answered to the loving but jealous little fairy, who still kept her bound to her side by some strange magic spell.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said Monsieur de Sainville, for it was he, "I thought you liked dancing?"

Nathalie looked up, colored a little, and raising herself without awakening the Canoness, replied, with slight embarrassment, "that she liked it," and stooping over Aunt Radegonde, she fanned her assiduously. He leaned against a neighboring tree. and began talking to her. Several times he glanced impatiently at his aunt, and once proposed to waken her. Nathalie refused, philosophically declaring "she did not care about the dancing." He smiled, and began teazing her pitilessly. Now he said, how merry the people looked as he passed through them; then he made her listen to the music, or gravely requested her to explain the various figures of the dance.

"Confess," he said at length, bending forward to see her averted face, "confess you wish my aunt would awaken."

"She was sure she did not care a bit;" but in her vexation she fanned the Canoness very fast.

"*Mon Dieu!* what a breeze!" exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, with a sudden start.

Nathalie looked confused; but he was not minding her.

"Aunt," he seriously said, "how could you be so unkind as to deprive Mademoiselle Montolieu of the dancing, when she is so fond of it?"

The conscience of Aunt Radegonde already upbraided her, and she took this remark very ill. With a sudden perverseness of judgment. in which she sometimes indulged, she now affected to consider every thing her nephew said as an offence. not to herself, but to Nathalie, whom she defended with angry warmth.

"Do not meddle with Petite, Armand; she is nothing to you."

"I beg your pardon, she is my ward."

"Your ward!"

"Yes, indeed, my ward."

"Armand, take my advice, do not meddle with young girls—you are not always kind to them; and you, Petite, do not mind him, he only wants to make us quarrel: do not mind him, but kiss me."

She stopped short in the path,—for they were going towards the lawn—as she spoke, and giving an indignant look at her nephew, she turned towards the young girl, who was preparing to comply with a smile, when Monsieur de Sainville quietly stepped between her and his aunt, took her arm within his, and stooping composedly, laid his moustache on the cheek Aunt Radegonde had destined to the rosy lips of Nathalie.

"Aunt," said he, with a smile, "the quarrel is not between you and Petite"—the word seemed to slip out unawares,—but between you and me; and we must not quarrel to-day."

A genuine caress from her nephew was so rare, that the Canoness was immediately pacified. They soon reached the scene of the fête, and Monsieur de Sainville, though not without much trouble and seeking on his part, found them convenient places. There neither loud music, nor crowding dances could give annoyance; there the awning and sheltering trees over head yielded their deepest shade; and there, too,—not the least important point for Nathalie,—the ladies could not only see the dancing, but be seen themselves. No sooner were they seated, than numerous gentlemen gathered around Monsieur de Sainville, who remained standing near them; and invitations poured thick and fast on the pretty girl who sat by his aunt. Every time she wrote down on her fan the name of a new partner, Nathalie could not refrain from giving her host a triumphant smile, destined to avenge her of all she had endured beneath the beech-tree.

Dancing may be delightful, but it is neither amusing to look at, nor interesting to describe, unless in extraordinary cases. We shall not, therefore, expatiate on the dancing, which afforded Nathalie so much delight, that every now and then in the midst of her enjoyment, she could not help, like an amused child, looking over her shoulder towards the spot where she had left her old friend, upon which Aunt Radegonde never failed to give her an encouraging nod; and her nephew sometimes paused, in a conversation, to catch her look and smile. The first time, however, that she returned to her seat, the Canoness seriously advised her to dance with less spirit and vivacity, "to do it more composedly, in short."

"I cannot," laughingly replied the young girl.

Here she felt some one stooping over her chair, and a kind voice whispered in her ear:

"Do not try; but enjoy yourself as much as you can, my child."

"What are you saying to her, Armand?" asked the Canoness.

Nathalie looked up, but he was gone.

The next time that Nathalie returned to the prudent Aunt Radegonde, she found her engaged in a close conversation with no less a personage than the Chevalier Théodore de Méranville-Louville. The Chevalier had the compassionate nature of the sex he adored; he had taken three tickets for the lottery, and purchased a card of admission to the fête. No one, who now saw him with snow-white cravat, diamond pin, and, above all, with an air so gallant and *dégagé*, could have suspected that these acts of munificence entailed a week's pinching economy on the kind-hearted dancing-master. He cared little, so long as appearances—modern honor—were saved Amongst the dancers were some of his pupils; he wished to watch their progress, and encourage their efforts by his presence. He did not intend dancing himself: he did not think it fair. He felt in the case of a fencing-master, who cannot fight a duel, with his own weapons at least. Unable to obtain a front seat, he placed himself behind the Canoness: he was not tall, and she was short, which made it convenient. But at the moment when he was most intent in looking over her head, a tall gentleman, passing by with hasty strides, pushed him rather rudely. Aunt Radegonde gave a little scream: the Chevalier remained aghast. He had been pushed, and pushed against a lady! His first impulse—for he was an irascible little man—was to rush after the tall gentleman, and chastise him on the instant; but a gentler feeling prevailed: he remained near the Canoness, who graciously assured him she was not hurt. "He feared this assurance proceeded only from her extreme goodness;" and, as he spoke, he gave the tall gentleman a look that said so plainly, "We shall meet again, sir," that the Canoness, knowing to what dreadful extremities gentlemen jealous of their honor sometimes allowed themselves to be carried, and who, from the ribbon at his button-hole, took the dancing-master for an officer retired from active service, became much alarmed, and exerted herself to soothe his ruffled spirit. Need we say that the tall gentleman, who always remained unconscious of the offence he had committed, and the risk he had run, was forgotten for the fascinating Canoness? Their innocent flirtation had reached its highest point of flowery speech on one hand, and of graceful complaisance on the other. In a moment of *entraînement*, the Chevalier had even forgotten his scruples so far as to solicit the Canoness to favor him with a contre-danse, and she had declined on the score of being a Canoness; for, though some Canonesses did dance, she could not approve of it, when Nathalie came up, and greeted her old frend with smiling welcome.

This recognition led to an increase of harmony, flowery speeches, and general pleasantness. The Chevalier made tender inquiries and gave minute information. Moral and intellectual cares weighed heavily on Mademoiselle Dantin, but strength of principle supported her through all. Nathalie, who felt happy and forgiving, smiled, and said she was glad to hear it. Days of pleasure pass rapidly; and when she saw the sun sinking in the west, and the dancers and groups on the lawn thinning gradually, this day seemed to the young girl to have been as brief and delightful as a dream. The Canoness, in whose monotonous existence the episode with the Chevalier formed a very agreeable incident, was beholding with equal regret the approach of evening, when a cold haughty voice observed by her side:

"Aunt, is it not growing cool?"

She looked round, and beheld her imperious niece: but the presence of strangers always infused a strong spirit of independence in Aunt Radegonde, who now quietly replied:

"Cool! Rosalie; I think it close;" and she fanned herself very coolly.

Madame Marceau gave her an astonished look; but she blandly said:

"My dear aunt, it is absolutely necessary that I should speak to you in private."

"I cannot leave Petite."

"Aunt," observed Madame Marceau, with her grandest air, "Mademoiselle Montolieu, or, indeed, any lady, is sufficiently protected by the mere fact of being here—the place is her shield"

The Canoness rose, but she still looked uncomfortable; the polite Chevalier partly relieved her, by promising to remain at Mademoiselle Montolieu's orders, in return for which he received her warm thanks, and one of Madame Marceau's coolest glances.

When Nathalie returned to her seat, she found Madame Marceau waiting for her; her dark face now wore a look of secret triumph. Without giving the Chevalier time to speak, she said, in her most caressing tone:

"You must be tired, Petite; do come and rest, before dinner."

She drew the arm of the young girl within her own, and led her away to the spot where a raised bench, standing beneath a separate awning, had occasionally received her during the course of the day. Madame de Jussac, who had only just arrived, half lay at one end of the seat, fanning herself with her air of well-bred *ennui;* she welcomed Nathalie very graciously, and made room for her by her side. Madame Marceau sat down at the other end of the bench.

"Have you been amused?" softly asked Madame de Jussac.

"Oh! very much indeed," replied Nathalie, with the glow of pleasure still on her cheek.

"How well this Spanish sort of thing becomes you!" admiringly said Madame Marceau; "does it not *ma chère?*"

"Before this evening, I never thought I could like the Spanish mantilla," quietly replied Madame de Jussac.

The young girl colored, and looked wonderingly from one to the other lady. Madame Marceau gave her an approving nod; Madame de Jussac smiled blandly, and her look said, "Yes, indeed, you are very charming."

"You like dancing?" she observed aloud.

"I love it!" replied Nathalie with sparkling eyes

"And when will you have another dance in this dull place, miserably dull for you!" sighed Madame Marceau.

"Miserably dull, madame! Never since I left Provence have I been so happy, so free from care, as here!"

"What a negative happiness?" kindly objected Madame Marceau. "In the summer Sainville can do, but in the winter! Just imagine, *ma bonne*," she added, addressing Madame de Jussac across Nathalie; "no society, nothing but newspapers, walks—when there is neither snow, rain, nor wind; an odd game of piquet with my aunt, and my silent brother walking up and down the drawing-room, evening after evening."

"Lamentable!" said Madame de Jussac, yawning slightly.

"I should like it," quietly observed Nathalie.

"Like it!" sharply echoed Madame Marceau.

"Yes, is there not a dreamy charm, or soothing repose in such a life?"

"I beg your pardon; I thought you liked pleasure?"

"Whilst it lasts! but to-morrow this place will seem empty; I shall miss the dance,—the music,—the faces,—the excitement."

"And pleasures should succeed one another too rapidly for reaction to have time to come. Quite the opinion of Madame de Méris, who will never allow this depressing reaction to come near you or her daughters."

Madame de Jussac spoke very quietly, but Nathalie fastened on her such a look of perfect astonishment, that the lady opened her fine blue eyes very wide, and half raising herself up, exclaimed with something approaching vivacity:

"Is this an indiscretion? It is your fault, Rosalie," she added, reproachfully glancing at her friend, "you should have checked me. *Ma foi, tant pis pour vous.*" She sank back into her old attitude with indolent and careless grace.

What did all this mean? Nathalie turned towards Madame Marceau: it was getting dark, but their looks met.

"Yes," she calmly said, "you have been a little indiscreet, *ma bonne*; but the mischief done is slight. You must know, my dear child," she added, taking and softly pressing Nathalie's hand, "that we do not think the mere fact of having you here, is a sufficient compensation for the painful past. No, we do not think so. More is due to you. Now it very fortunately happens, that the Marquise de Méris has asked her sister-in-law, Madame de Jussac, to find for her daughters—a companion, not a guide or governess, of their own age and temper; one is seventeen; the other eighteen; they are very gay, high-spirited girls. You will do admirably. Your sole task, my dear, will be to amuse yourself as well as you can; a task that becomes you charmingly. I do not speak of the other matters: suffice it to say, that Madame de Méris has a princely fortune, and spends it with princely grace. I need not say how grieved we are at parting with you, but we sacrifice our own feelings to your good. The manner in which you enjoyed this solitary day of pleasure proves to us that it would be cruel and selfish to detain you here. We will not do so. You will see Madame de Méris at dinner this evening. She spends the night here, and is so anxious to have you, that she talks of taking you away with her to-morrow. But I scarcely think we can spare you so soon." She spoke quite affectionately. A slight nervous tremor shook the hand which she still held, but the young girl never opened her lips.

"Do you know that Madame de Méris has taken a box at both Operas?" carelessly said Madame de Jussac.

"Indeed!" observed Madame Marceau, "she is fond of music?"

"Passionately!"

"How fortunate! Mademoiselle Montolieu sings charmingly."

"Fortunate, indeed! Eliza gives such exquisite little amateur concerts. But perhaps Mademoiselle's voice is a soprano?" she added in a tone of apprehension.

"No! it is a very fine contralto voice."

Madame de Jussac was delighted. A soprano voice would have been good; but a contralto was invaluable. Madame de Méris had been longing for a contralto. After dwelling a little longer on this topic, the conversation took another turn; the balls which Madame de Méris gave, those to which she went, and to which Nathalie would of course accompany her and her daughters; the company they received,—the delightful Tuesdays they had,—the magnificent châteaux they possessed in various provinces,—the splendid and luxuriant life they led, were all carelessly mentioned in turn. And as Madame de Jussac explained, Madame Marceau admired, and Nathalie sat pale and silent between both.

"So Madame de Méris is as gay as ever," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville, who, whilst they were thus engaged, had come up, unperceived, and now joined in the conversation.

There was a brief pause. Nathalie started slightly, and looked up. Madame Marceau cast a rapid and anxious look at her brother; he stood facing her at the other end of the seat, partly leaning over the indolent Madame de Jussac, who merely turned up her eyes, to observe, languidly:

"Does the fan annoy you?"

"Not in the least."

"Ah! I am glad of it." She resumed her favorite occupation, one moment interrupted.

The heart of Nathalie was beating fast; her color came and went; she trembled visibly. It was well for her that evening was closing in; but the two ladies, between whom she sat, might have braved the light of sun or lamp. The pride of the one, the composure of the other, defied scrutiny.

"So Madame de Méris is as gay as ever?" again said Monsieur de Sainville, speaking in precisely the same tone as before.

Madame de Jussac smiled assent.

"You will like her so much, *chère* Petite," calmly observed Madame Marceau, turning to Nathalie.

"Then when she said *we*, she meant that he knew and approved this," thought Nathalie; whilst a keen pang shot through her heart.

"She means to spend this winter in Paris, I believe?" he quietly continued.

"Yes, in Paris," replied Madame de Jussac, with perfect tranquillity.

"What a delightful change for you, Petite,—from dull Sainville to gay Paris!" exclaimed Madame Marceau.

Nathalie did not reply.

"Are you fond of change?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie made an effort to reply that she liked change very much.

"Then I suppose you will be glad to see Paris?" he continued.

She supposed so.

"How very provoking!" he resumed, with his peculiar smile. "I am grieved to be the bearer of painful tidings; but it is unfortunately too true that you will not see Paris this winter."

"What! Is not Madame de Méris going?" asked Madame Marceau, thrown off her guard.

"Yes, I believe she is going," was the calm reply.

"Then why may not Mademoiselle Montolieu see Paris this winter?" inquired his sister once more, quite composed.

"Because Mademoiselle Montolieu will spend this winter at Sainville."

"You wish it!" exclaimed Madame Marceau, with a fiery look in the direction of Nathalie.

"I protest against Mademoiselle Montolieu having any voice in this matter," said Monsieur de Sainville, with provoking composure. "What chance has our dull home against the syren city? Besides, being an interested party, she has no right to decide in her own case."

"Then you are judge in this matter " bitterly remarked

Madame Marceau, applying her vinaigrette as she spoke "Judge and jury."

"No; I merely represent my aunt, who bids Mademoiselle Montolieu leave at her peril."

Madame Marceau indignantly fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

"My aunt agreed a while ago," she said, shortly.

"Yes; but she has changed her mind since."

"She will reconsider the matter, Armand."

"I do not think so."

"My aunt is not so selfish as to wish to immure Mademoiselle Montolieu in this dull place."

"Selfishness is so ingenious! My aunt persists in declaring that Mademoiselle Montolieu prefers Sainville to Paris."

"Armand!" exclaimed Madame Marceau, in a tone of stately surprise, "you cannot mean to say our aunt dreams of detaining Mademoiselle Montolieu against her will?"

Without answering his sister, Monsieur de Sainville turned towards Nathalie, and remarked, in his tranquil way:

"Do not trust to the delusive hopes my sister holds out. My aunt declares you have passed your word to spend the winter here with her; she leaves you no other alternative, save to remain, or break your word by going. As to changing her fixed resolve, it is out of the question;—we are a wilful race!"

"Nathalie looked up, and as she did so, she detected the glance which passed between Madame Marceau and her brother —angry confusion on her side; calm, inflexible will, on his. All this tacit plotting, counter-plotting, and polite quarrelling, was so much out of the young girl's way, so foreign to any thing which had yet come within her experience, that she knew not how to act. She had not the patience and worldly knowledge that can guide safely through the treacherous breakers of undefined conventionalities, and fearful of compromising her dignity and her pride, she had for once the wisdom and prudence to remain silent.

"Armand," observed Madame Marceau, after a pause, and now speaking very calmly, "has my aunt reflected that Madame de Méris has also a claim over Mademoiselle Montolieu—that she will be hurt, and, above all, deeply disappointed?"

"Be quite easy, Rosalie," replied her brother, with slight irony; "I took it on myself to break the matter to Madame de Méris; and I am happy to say she bore the painful tidings with all the fortitude of a woman of the world."

"How cool it is getting," said Madame de Jussac, with a shiver. "Monsieur de Sainville, will you be kind enough to let me take your arm?"

She rose as she spoke: he silently complied with the lady's request. Nathalie watched them walking away with a beating heart. Madame Marceau still sat near her. She was an imperious lady; her will had been thwarted; what would she not say, in her anger? She said nothing, but watched the figures of her brother and Madame de Jussac, as they slowly vanished in the winding path they had taken. When they were no longer to be seen, she rose, with majestic pride, wrapped her fine figure in her magnificent shawl, and brushed past the young girl, in haughty silence. Nathalie remained alone. She felt this slight more keenly perhaps than any thing else; she could forgive the scheme for sending her away—the proud lady did not know how little she cared for her son—but to punish and slight her because that scheme happened to be defeated, was cruel and ungenerous. She had suffered acutely during the last half-hour, and bowing her face in her hands, she now wept silently. A sound near her made her raise her head; she looked up, and saw Monsieur de Sainville, who had returned, and now sat down by her side.

CHAPTER XVI.

"You are weeping," said he; "why so?"

"I am not weeping," she replied, with slight equivocation.

"But you were: the tears are still on your cheeks. Why is this? No reply! I will tell you why you weep: it is because you feel you have not been well used; and, indeed, you have not."

Nathalie looked at him. His face was severe, but she felt its severity was not for her.

"My poor child," he resumed, speaking very kindly, "do not take this to heart; if my sister knew even what I know, she would not act thus. I once mentioned her views to you, and I told her what you told me; but I perceive she labors under the impression, that no woman in her senses can remain indifferent to the love and admiration of her son."

Nathalie smiled scornfully; he saw it, and continued:

"Without knowing the exact state of your feelings, I am, nevertheless, inclined to believe her mistaken."

There was a pause; Nathalie did not speak.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he said, very seriously, "have you a great objection to tell me what you refused to tell Charles the other evening; namely, what you feel for him?"

She seemed to hesitate.

"I will tell you," she said, at length, "if I may be quite frank."

"As frank as you wish: it is your friend, not the uncle of Charles, who listens."

"Sir," she resumed, "your nephew is handsome, I do not deny it; there is talent in his face. I believe him clever; as your nephew, he is much higher in station than any man who will ever think of marrying me; he probably will have much wealth, and if he has persecuted me with his intentions, I cannot but confess to myself, that it must be because he is much in love ——"

She stopped short, and colored deeply, as he who looked could see, in spite of the obscurity.

"Well?" he said, with his look still full on her face.

"You will not think what I am going to tell you strange?' she asked, hesitatingly.

"Strange!" he echoed, a little sadly; "my poor child, in those matters I think nothing strange."

"Well, then," she rejoined, pressing her right hand to her heart, and speaking very earnestly, "I feel here in a manner I understand very well, but cannot explain, that I shall never love. or even like him."

There was a pause.

"Why so?" he at length asked.

"Because, without imputing evil to him, I do not think him good."

"My dear child, are you so romantic as to expect perfection?"

"No; for I am far from being perfect myself."

"Besides," he continued, very seriously, "remember this great truth—the being who loves, is certainly, for the time that he or she loves, good."

"Sir," said Nathalie, quite as seriously, "do you think that Monsieur Marceau feels any thing like genuine tenderness or affection for me? Do you think that, if I had the small-pox, for instance, he would ever care to see me again? Because, if you think so," she added, after a brief pause, "I do not."

He said nothing: he was secretly wondering at the intuitive, but unerring tact with which this seemingly heedless girl had arrived at the distinction between passion and tenderness.

"I thank you truly for your frankness and confidence," he observed at length. "If I asked this question, it was, with your permission, to satisfy my sister, without telling her that which it would hurt her maternal feelings to hear,—that her fears were wholly groundless."

"You may do, sir, as you wish."

"And you will spend the winter here?"

She shook her head gravely.

"No, sir; I have had too clear a proof to-night of what I suspected, before I had been two days here—namely, that I was not in the house of Madame Marceau, but in that of Monsieur de Sainville; not with her will, but through his."

"And is Mademoiselle Montolieu too proud to allow Monsieur de Sainville the pleasure of considering her his guest?" he asked very kindly.

"Oh, no; not too proud," replied the poor girl, with tears in her eyes and in her voice; "it is not fair to call that pride."

She was evidently much depressed. Her head drooped on her bosom, her hands lay clasped upon her lap; she looked pale in the light of the rising moon. There was sadness even in her attitude. He remembered her in the joyous mood of the afternoon, gay, smiling, and bright; with her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks flushed from the excitement of the dance: the contrast pained him.

"What is it then?" he asked soothingly.

"The sense of my own dignity, which I am alone to guard," she firmly replied, looking up.

"I respect your scruples; but if my sister, herself, asks you to stay, will you not do so?"

Nathalie shook her head again.

"I know, sir, that you have a strong will, and that every one in this house obeys it, but I do not wish it to be exercised for me."—He smiled and did not seem offended at the imputation of wilfulness,—far from it; but he quietly assured her, that as soon as he could explain the matter to her, Madame Marceau would of her own accord offer to repair her injustice; and he pledged his word to the young girl, not to insist on her remaining unless it happened exactly so. Still Nathalie did not seem convinced.

"*Allons*," he observed with a dissatisfied smile, "I perceive Sainville is dull, and Paris irresistible."

"Indeed I do not care for Paris!" quickly replied Nathalie, pained at this reproach.

He looked incredulous.

"Upon my word!" she said, with ingenuous earnestness.

"What! you do not care for a life of pleasure, of balls, dances, plays, and so forth?" he inquired with his keen look.

"Indeed, I do not. Besides, there is dancing here also."

"Then, my child," he remarked, in his usual tone, "do not think of going with Madame de Méris. She is gay, thoughtless; unfit to protect any young girl."

"Has she not daughters, sir?"

"Two, on whom nature has bestowed an excellent safeguard, and to whom fortune has moreover granted the protection of large dowries."

"I can protect myself," returned Nathalie with some pride.

"From wrong, I believe you; from annoyance, allow me to doubt it. Besides, for reasons not offensive to you, but useless to mention, I am convinced that Madame de Méris, willing to oblige my sister as she is, would very soon regret having accepted you as the companion of her daughters."

"And why so?" asked Nathalie, rather offended.

"Because," he replied, with a smile, "they are very plain."

"Ah!" she said, a little disconcerted.

"Well," he resumed, "have I convinced you?"

"I have another objection."

"Another!"

"Yes, sir, another. Why should I stay here, and by my presence, deprive Madame Marceau of her son's society?"

"I might answer to this, that as you are innocent and as he is culpable, it is only just he should suffer; but you would raise some other objection. Suffice it then to mention, that my sister is ambitious for her son; that she is very glad of a pretence to keep him away at his studies; and that to prevent him from losing his time in the province, she intends spending part of the winter in Paris. Have you any other objection?"

Nathalie looked at him very seriously.

"Sir," she said, "I will abide by your decision, for I have faith in your judgment and good feeling. But if you had a daughter, situated as I am, would you as her father——"

"Pray do not use that comparison," he interrupted, looking up and unable to repress a smile, "I am an old bachelor; the fatherly instinct is most imperfectly developed in me; I give you my word I have no idea how, as your father, I would, or ought to behave in such a matter."

"Well, then, if you had a sister," resumed Nathalie, slightly disconcerted.

"I have a sister," he replied, with some gloom.

"I beg your pardon, I understand," very hastily rejoined Nathalie, rising as she spoke.

"You impatient child, do you not understand at all," said he gently, compelling her to resume her seat; "you take fire on a word. Little credit as you give me for feeling, give me credit for common politeness. I disclaimed your comparison, because it rested on an impossible relationship. Have you then forgotten that I am your guardian, and that of your own accord you once called me your friend? Why did you not appeal to the friend and guardian?"

"And what would his answer have been?" asked Nathalie, looking up.

"Remain!"

"Then I will," she exclaimed, yielding to an irresistible impulse, "for I believe, sir, that you are my friend; yes, my friend indeed!"

In a fit of southern fervor she shook his hand and raised it so that it touched her lips, but she dropped it almost immediately, and rose from the seat pale and frightened at her own indiscretion. All that Mademoiselle Dantin had ever urged on feminine propriety rushed back to her mind to alarm her; as for any other feeling, save one of pure and grateful emotion, such as a very child might have felt, her conscience acquitted her of it, and though she was much mortified, she felt no shame.

Monsieur de Sainville had not moved, and as he sat in the shade she could not read the expression of his features. There was a brief and embarrassed pause.

"I see you wish to go in," he quietly observed, rising, and taking her arm as he spoke.

Nathalie did not answer, but, looking around her, she perceived that the grounds were almost solitary, and felt somewhat surprised at not having noticed this before. They walked home in profound silence. In her first terror of being misconstrued, she longed to explain, but her pride revolted against it.

"No," she thought, "if he has so little tact and delicacy as not to perceive that I was only foolish, let him think all he likes."

They had entered the château, and stood in the lighted hall, as she came to this conclusion. She could not resist the temptation of looking up into his face as they parted. He seemed so calm and friendly, that a weight was immediately removed from her mind. She felt that she had not been misunderstood; that her fear was an act of injustice to herself, above all, of injustice to him.

She went up to her room, and abstained from appearing at the late and large dinner which was to precede the lottery. She sat near her open window, thinking, when a gentle tap at her room door roused her from her abstraction. It was Aunt Radegonde come to fetch her. She began by dwelling pathetically on the shock Nathalie's projected departure had given her.

"Oh! Petite," she concluded, with a sigh, "how glad I am that Armand did interfere! It is very selfish, of course, for me to wish you to remain here, and so Rosalie told me; still I cannot help it. I cannot help being delighted at your staying, and am very grateful to Armand, who, for my sake, made it all right again. Well, are you coming? the lottery has already begun."

Nathalie pleaded a headache.

"We shall keep out of the noise in the little back drawing-room; the folding-doors have been taken down, and there is a handsome velvet drapery instead. Armand said it would be better for us to stay there, and that he would take care of my tickets for me. You must come. He is quite vexed because you were not present at the dinner. He sent me up to fetch you, saying, he knew you would not mind a servant's message, but that you could not refuse me. He added that he, your guardian, summoned you to make your appearance below; and though I think myself it is rather ridiculous for him to persist in claiming you as his ward, still he has been so good to-day, that we must indulge him a little. Just take off that mantilla, if you like; your dress will do very well."

Nathalie at length yielded to her arguments, and accompanied her down stairs. Madame Marceau had invited about forty or fifty select guests to be present at the drawing of the lottery. They were chiefly persons whose political connections and influence might be useful to her brother in the approaching elections. A few belonged to the provincial aristocracy; by far the greater number were of the wealthy *bourgeoisie.* After skilfully agitating amongst their inferior brethren in the afternoon's fête, she had reserved these for the evening's seductions. About twenty of the most influential had come to dinner. The saloon was brilliantly lit up, and as there were many well-dressed women, it looked gay and pretty; but Madame Marceau had done every thing to avoid éclat; she wished this to appear what she repeatedly called it,—"a little domestic fête and familiar réunion."

The lottery was already far advanced when the two ladies entered. At one end of the drawing-room, stood a small table, with a silver urn, from which a young and pretty girl, the daughter of the Prefect, gravely drew forth, one after another, small scrolls of paper, rolled like ancient papyrus manuscripts; on each of these scrolls was inscribed the number of a ticket, to which capricious Fortune sometimes adjudged a prize, and oftener a blank. Another table, much larger, stood facing this; it was covered with the prizes, which the elder sister of the first young girl graciously distributed to the winners. Both tables were surrounded by animated groups, talking and laughing with French vivacity. Nathalie only caught a glimpse of this scene. through which the Canoness hurried her.

"It is much pleasanter here, is it not?" she observed, drawing aside the velvet drapery, which fell once more in dark and heavy folds behind them.

The little saloon had been tastily fitted up as a sort of cool retreat, which Madame Marceau had destined to her political *têtes-à-têtes;* little anticipating that it would be occupied by her aunt and Nathalie. It was redolent with the fragrance of exquisite flowers and shrubs; a solitary lamp, suspended from the ceiling, shed around a pale, trembling ray, which scarcely dispelled the mysterious twilight of the place. Madame Marceau and her friend sat on a low divan; Monsieur de Sainville stood near them. No one else was present. On perceiving Nathalie, Madame Marceau called up her most gracious smile, rose, went up to her and took her hand.

"*Chère* Petite," she said, "you look pale. Are you tired? Do you know, I think you are too delicate a great deal for the excitement of pleasure?"

"If you had seen her dancing, you would not think so," decisively interrupted Aunt Radegonde.

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a significant look; but the Canoness neither took nor understood the hint.

"Indeed, aunt," resumed the lady, Mademoiselle Montolieu is more delicate than you think; and I begin to imagine that the country air is not only quite necessary to her, but that Paris——"

"I tell you she is not delicate at all," again interrupted Aunt Radegonde, now speaking rather indignantly.

Madame Marceau saw her aunt would spoil all, if she continued to dwell on this theme; she therefore observed, in a wholly altered tone, and slightly drawing herself up to speak with suitable dignity:

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, we are friends; indeed, we have never ceased to be so. Yes," she continued, lowering her voice, and speaking with affected discretion, but not so low as not to be heard from the divan, "I feel now that we are friends, beyond the power of misunderstanding. I am sorry not to have sought myself the clear explanation which my brother, with his prompt judgment, perceived to be necessary. I need not tell you how I admire your resolve,—the result of a prudence and high principle almost above your years. Still less need I tell you how sincerely I hope our dull house may long be your home."

She pressed her hand, beckoned to her friend, and left the place. Monsieur de Sainville waited until the velvet drapery had fallen upon them to approach Nathalie, and say, in a low tone:

"Are you content?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

He left them.

Monsieur de Sainville had taken an early opportunity to inform his sister that Nathalie had pledged herself never to become the wife of Charles Marceau. More than this he had not said; nor had she asked to know more. Satisfied with this assurance, and anxious to please her brother, with whom she felt she had already ventured farther than was either prudent or expedient, Madame Marceau had immediately exclaimed "that she felt the greatest regard for Mademoiselle Montolieu, and would, in her dear Armand's presence, ask her to stay." To which her dear Armand, without thinking it necessary to inform her that she had unconsciously suggested the only condition on which Nathalie would now remain, had quietly replied:

"Indeed, Rosalie, you will please me very much by doing so."

"Please him! Why had he not said so at once? Was there any thing she wished more than to please him? But he was so unkind; he would not let her know what pleased him! She guessed sometimes"—this was a hint for the elections—"and other times she failed; all because he was so reserved with his poor Rosalie."

Before, however, making this concession, Madame Marceau had prudently dropped a few hints to her friend. She had feelingly deplored the hardships of certain positions, which, in violence to the heart's better feelings, often compelled one to act with seeming unkindness. When a young man of fortune and family took a fancy to a pretty face, it was very difficult to guess that the individual thus distinguished had sufficient humility and principle not to be dazzled, and mistake what was only a passing caprice for a serious attachment; and hard to imagine that, on being properly appealed to, this individual could solemnly pledge herself never to enter into a secret or open engagement with the infatuated youth. Madame de Jussac, who heard her with a smile, assured her that she was not so much astonished; she had heard of such things, and found nothing incredible in the present case. But Madame Marceau, resolved she should be satisfied that it was really so, had taken care to make her assist at the explanation, which she had worded so that it might please both her brother and the mother of her in whom she still hoped to see the future bride of Charles. For though Nathalie was to spend this winter in Sainville, Madame Marceau by no means contemplated her prolonged sojourn as either desirable or proper, and did not apprehend the want of a convenient pretence, whenever the time arrived, for her to go in earnest.

Aunt Radegonde did not look much pleased when her nephew left them to the seclusion of the little saloon. "He might have stayed; but, thank heaven, they could do without him,—and without any one else, too. This was a nice quiet place; yet, if Nathalie preferred the drawing-room, they would go in."

Nathalie assured her that she preferred this retired spot; they remained; few came to disturb their seclusion, or paid them more than passing visits. The Canoness drew the divan near the drapery, and slightly drawing this aside fastened it, so that whilst remaining in its deep shadow they could see and hear almost all that passed in the drawing-room. Nathalie looked and listened but she could fix her attention on nothing. Whilst the childish voice of the young girl near the silver urn read scroll after scroll, and exclamations of affected triumph, and still more affected disappointment, greeted her announcements of gain or loss, her memory wandered back to the incidents of the afternoon. Now she saw herself lying under the beech-tree; then she heard once more the music of the dance, or suddenly found herself sitting alone with Monsieur de Sainville, and hearing his melancholy voice say to her, "Strange! in those matters, I thing nothing strange." She looked for him amongst the guests; he sat by Madame de Jussac; not a word of their conversation reached her ear; but though they smiled, she knew it was not friendly; in vain the lady seemed to pour forth her softest blandishments; something stern in his face, which Nathalie knew very well, remained still to show that he disowned her power. From them, Nathalie's glance wandered to other groups; but her head throbbed and burned; the glaring light annoyed her; she soon drew back into the shade, and heard, without heeding, the remarks of Aunt Radegonde, blending with the hum of the many conversations in the drawing-room. About an hour had thus elapsed, when the Canoness exclaimed:

"The lottery is over, and here is Armand coming, with our prizes."

The divan was immediately restored to its former place, as Monsieur de Sainville entered, followed by a servant, carrying a small tray, on which appeared the prizes, by no means numerous. The servant placed the tray on a small table near the divan, and retired.

"Aunt," said Monsieur de Sainville, opening his pocket-book, "I took charge of your fifteen tickets—I also attended to my own—forty in all. Less prudent than you, I allowed myself to be victimized to the extent of twenty-five tickets, at the price of two francs each. Well, aunt, my deliberate conclusion is, that of all the cheating transactions I ever witnessed, and I have seen a good many, a charitable lottery is the most barefaced."

"What! Armand; was there not fair play?"

"No. I acquit the individuals, but I accuse the system; it is founded, from beginning to end, on victimizing, which falls chiefly on my unfortunate sex. Ladies get up these things, and seduce their male friends into the purchase of tickets, for which they work prizes, which being all essentially feminine articles, are useless when won, and therefore return to them as presents; we pay and do the real charity—always deluded into the belief that we shall get our money's worth—they obtain all the praise."

"Armand," impatiently said his aunt, "do tell us what we have got? The first five tickets are for Petite."

"The first five tickets were blanks."

"Poor child!" observed the Canoness, turning towards Nathalie; "you shall share my better fortune."

"The next ten tickets obtained one prize."

"One! only one! and what was it?"

"A cigar-case. Here it is."

"A cigar-case!" exclaimed Aunt Radegonde; "and what am I to do with a cigar-case!"

"Any thing you like, aunt, provided you do not offer it to me."

"Well, Armand, what did your twenty-five tickets get?"

"Three prizes, essentially feminine, of course, and one of them my own gift to the lottery. Here is a purse, aunt, which may not be of much use to you, but which you will value for the sake of the maker."

He dropped Nathalie's ridiculed purse in his aunt's lap, as he spoke.

"Have you got nothing for Petite, Armand?"

"Yes; this pair of Chinese slippers; I can warrant them genuine, for I brought them from Canton myself."

Nathalie thanked him, and looked delighted.

"What a pity they are so small," said the Canoness, taking up one of the slippers.

"They are not too small," promptly observed her nephew.

"Indeed they are, Armand."

"I assure you, aunt, they are not."

"How can you tell?"

"I know they are not too small."

"I never saw any one so dogmatic," impatiently said the Canoness; "but I am determined you shall not always have your way."

Before Nathalie could guess what she was going to do, or oppose, she put the slipper on the young girl's foot; she remained mute—it fitted.

"Well, aunt?" said Monsieur de Sainville, with a smile.

"Well—what about it?" sharply asked his aunt; "Po tite does not want your ugly Chinese things; take them back."

She pushed the remaining slipper over to him; but Nathalie quickly snatched it back, on perceiving Monsieur de Sainville extending his hand to take it, and deliberately put it on; then looked at her feet with all the admiration of a child for its new toy.

"Take them off, Petite," said the Canoness: "ugly things, with their turned-up toes!"

Nathalie laughed, said they were original, and that she would wear them. The remonstrances of the Canoness induced her to take them off, but she persisted in keeping them. Aunt Radegonde, who was either domineered over, or domineering, looked peevish, until she remembered they had not yet seen the remaining prize. He produced it, a plain brown silk purse, which he intended keeping, because it was strong and safe. The Canoness looked triumphant: it was she who had begun that purse, and Petite who had finished it, "so that Monsieur Armand, after all his ridiculing, was glad to have something of their manufacture." Monsieur Armand indulged his aunt in her triumph, and sat down by her side. She reminded him once that he ought to appear in the drawing-room; but he quietly replied, "I am not host to-day—I am guest; I shall stay here: I prefer it."

He remained, and entered into a conversation with his aunt; but Nathalie, though usually attentive to his discourse, could not keep her mind fixed upon it now. The fatigue of the day weighed her down, and the vague sounds from the next room lulled her to sleep. At first she resisted; then, spite of all her efforts, her head became more and more heavy: the little saloon, with its flowery recesses, and pale lamp, seemed to float in a mist before her eyes; at length her lids closed, and she slept. Once she was half-awakened by the voice of Monsieur de Sainville, suddenly saying:

"Poor little thing! she has fallen asleep."

"Shall I awaken her, and take her to her room, Armand?" asked the voice of his aunt.

"Why so? she looks very comfortable thus."

"Then help me to put this cushion under her head."

Nathalie felt her head gently raised for a moment; the next it had sunk into the soft pillow placed beneath it, and she was once more in a deep slumber. She had slept thus for some time, when she suddenly awoke with the vague, undefined consciousness, that something—she knew not what—had hap pened. She looked up with a start: the sounds from the drawing-room had ceased: all in the little saloon was silent. The lamp still burned with its clear pale ray; the velvet drapery was slightly drawn aside, and in the opening stood the calm and handsome Madame de Jussac, looking like a vision, in her white silk dress. Nathalie eyed her with surprise; for the lady's languid face now wore a peculiar smile, half of irony, half of triumph. The young girl looked around her; the Canoness was peacefully nodding by her side. Where was Monsieur de Sainville? She turned slightly, and beheld him standing within a few paces of the divan. His face looked more dark and morose than she had seen it for many a day; it was at him Madame de Jussac looked; he returned her glance with evident *hauteur*.

"Have they been quarrelling?" thought Nathalie.

"What a charming place to meditate in," said the lady; "I do not wonder that a philosopher, a grave, reflective man, like you, should find it delightful."

"I suspect there has been more sleep here than meditation," said Madame Marceau. whose dark and smiling face now appeared over the shoulder of her friend.

"*I* did not sleep," said the Canoness, wakening up.

Madame de Jussac smiled.

"Neither did your nephew," she said; "I found him engaged in a deep fit of musing."

"Politics!" observed Madame Marceau, coming in and looking very graciously at her brother; for the influential individuals whom she had that evening sounded, had entered into her views even more readily than she could in her warmest anticipations have hoped.

Nathalie perceiving that the guests were gone, rose and entered the front drawing-room; it was empty. Some of the lights were out; most had burned low; the floor was covered with fragments of the little scrolls; a few withered bouquets lay about; the whole room wore that disordered aspect so admirably conveyed in Hogarth's celebrated picture. Nathalie looked around her, and thought that those late pleasures had something dreary and hollow in all their gay brilliancy. Without seeking to listen, she overheard the close of a conversation between Madame Marceau and her brother in the little saloon.

"I cannot understand," he said, in a dry, sharp voice, "how so absurd a rumor was propagated. Not less than five persons mentioned it to me this evening as a current report. I, a candidate at the approaching elections! I, trying to become deputy: the mere idea is ridiculous."

"Monsieur de Sainville is above politics!" said the soft ironical voice of Madame de Jussac.

"Armand," asked his sister, in a low but distinct tone, "do you mean to say, that if a canditateship is offered to you, you will decline it?"

"I mean to say, that I shall decline it."

Nathalie heard Madame Marceau rise abruptly, and leave the little saloon with a quick hurried step. She approached the table near which the young girl stood; took up a volume of engravings, turned over the pages with a trembling hand, then closed the book and pushed it away with angry haste. Nathalie looked at her with evident but unobserved wonder: there was no mistaking the meaning of the bent brow, flashing eyes and compressed lips; resentment, the deeper for its suppression, was in every haughty and quivering lineament. For a few minutes she stood there struggling against passion; at length her features became somewhat more composed; a chair was by her; she sat down with moody and abstracted glance. At the very moment when her schemes seemed near their fulfilment, her brother—their supposed instrument—stepped in and blasted them with a few haughty words. Twice in one evening had her haughty will to vail before his; the first disappointment had seemed light until this second deeper one gave it new bitterness. She felt baffled, irritated, and aggrieved; for years she had looked up to Monsieur de Sainville as the hope of her fallen fortunes; but now, she bitterly asked herself if, after being the good, he could not become the evil genius of her destiny.

She made an effort to smooth her brow, and look cheerful as Madame de Jussac drew near. The legitimist lady had never been in the secret of her political plans, and she flattered herself with the belief, that they were too deeply laid to be divined by her; to her great relief it was not her whom the lady addressed, but Nathalie.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, in her soft caressing voice, "I have been persuading our good Canoness to come home with me to-morrow: of course you will accompany her?"

Nathalie was somewhat taken by surprise, but she quietly assented. Madame Marceau looked up with slight astonishment, soon succeeded by indifference. Her aunt and Nathalie might go where they liked: other thoughts occupied her.

"Come, Petite," said the Canoness, leaving the little saloon in her turn, "what are you doing here? Look, it is near one. Well, what do you want in there?" she added, as she saw Nathalie push the drapery aside; "the slippers! Why you do not want to wear them at night; ugly things!"

Without heeding her the young girl re-entered the little saloon. Monsieur de Sainville sat alone on the divan more morose than ever. He looked up and his look was not gracious.

"Have you forgotten any thing?" he asked, in a brief tone.

"The slippers, sir," she replied with a glance of surprise.

He had never addressed her thus before.

"Here they are." He handed them to her quickly, as if her presence importuned him.

Nathalie took them silently, but when she reached the drapery she suddenly came back. She remembered Madame de Jussac's invitation, and thought he might be offended about that.

"Sir," said she, simply, "have I done any thing wrong?"

He looked at her with evident surprise. She stood before him with serious, yet child-like grace, and he could not help thinking, that none save a child would have asked such a question.

"You have done nothing wrong," he replied, in his usual tone; "but it is late, my aunt is waiting for you: good night."

CHAPTER XVII.

At an early hour on the following morning, Madame de Jussac left, accompanied by the Canoness and her young companion. Her château was a few leagues away; Nathalie had often heard it mentioned as one of the most elegant and luxurious abodes in the province. She expected to be pleased, and was only disappointed; it was essentially a modern abode, and wealth could not replace the antique charm of Sainville.

The same disappointment awaited her in the pleasures which the château afforded; they were varied and frequent, but to Nathalie they seemed cold and monotonous. Thanks to the evident partiality of Madame de Jussac for her, she could not complain of neglect; indeed, she received great and very flattering attention; but she received it with indifference, for during the whole week that the visit lasted, she was a prey to *ennui.* "If this is good society," thought she, "I have enough of it." She found some pleasure, however, in walking in the garden. There was a high terrace, with marble vases filled with flowers, that reminded her of Sainville, and from which the old château was visible in the fine weather. She came there early in the morning, before the Canoness was up, and was generally joined by Madame de Jussac.

"You are looking for Sainville," said the lady to her, one morning, when she found her standing by the stone balustrade, with her look fastened on the horizon; "you cannot see it yet, the mist is too great; you seem to like Sainville."

"I like it very much."

"Yes, it is a pleasant place."

She took the young girl's arm; they walked up and down the lonely terrace; the lady spoke of Sainville and its inhabitants; Nathalie listened. The name of Charles Marceau happened to be mentioned, and Nathalie, with a heedlessness which she immediately repented, allowed Madame de Jussac to perceive that the intended marriage between the young man and her daughter was known to her. Madame de Jussac looked amused.

"So, my dear child," she said, smiling, "you really have believed that a daughter of mine would one day be Madame Charles Marceau."

Nathalie looked disconcerted; Madame de Jussac kindly assured her she was not in the least offended, though the idea had certainly amused her. She then proceeded to an analysis of her friend's son, from which it appeared that Charles was ignorant and presumptuous, without either the name or position which could induce even the most kindly disposed to overlook those disadvantages.

"Is he not to take the name of De Sainville, and is he not his uncle's heir?" asked Nathalie.

Madame de Jussac gave her a penetrating glance, and asked her, with a smile, if she believed this. Nathalie quietly assured her that she did; upon which Madame de Jussac composedly replied that she did not think so. She spoke like one who knew more than she said.

"The only real claim of Monsieur Charles Marceau on at tention," she resumed, after a pause, "is that he chances to be the nephew of a gentleman who might, if he wished, be the first man of this district, and indeed of the province; but who, spite of the haughty inaction to which he condemns himself, is, nevertheless, a very remarkable man."

Nathalie heard her with surprise, but she was destined to be more astonished still. Madame de Jussac, with a freedom from pique and resentment which charmed her listener, proceeded to draw a highly-colored and somewhat flattering portrait of her late host. He was not only the soul of generosity and honor,—not only a man of powerful and varied intellect,—but he was naturally of a most amiable and winning disposition. Nathalie could not help demurring; she thought him cold and severe.

"My dear child," softly said the lady, "you would not think so if you had seen what I have seen; namely, Monsieur de Sainville in love."

Nathalie looked as if she longed to question; but there was no need; Madame de Jussac was willing to speak.

"It was indeed some years ago; but I assure you that he was then what he is now; the difference, if there was any, was slight. I have some experience; I have seen many men in love, but he is the only one who, to my seeming, could love deeply, passionately even, without looking foolish or ridiculous; and if you could only guess how rare, how very rare, that is!"

She said more, but her language was less clear than she who listened desired; indeed, she soon completely changed the subject, and from Monsieur de Sainville passed to Monsieur de Sainville's political opinions. She deplored that a man of his birth and talent declined devoting himself to the cause of legitimacy, and as Nathalie did not seem much impressed with this reasoning, she entered into a long and detailed explanation of the legitimist doctrines, which lasted an hour and a half. Every morning a similar conversation recurred between them, with this difference, that the name of Charles Marceau was no more mentioned, and that the political lectures of Madame de Jussac became more and more eloquent. Nathalie did not for one moment imagine that her conversion to legitimacy was the lady's object, and though expressions, which she did not then notice, but which she afterwards remembered, led her to think so at a later period, her present impression was, that her hostess had taken a fancy to her, and mentioned politics because politics were uppermost in her mind.

The day for their return came at length, and there was something in Nathalie's face as they neared Sainville, which struck even the Canoness. The young girl was always looking out of the carriage-window, admiring every thing which they passed, and praising all she saw with so much warmth and animation, that Aunt Radegonde observed with much finesse,—

"Ah! Petite, you want me to think you are delighted to go home; you want me to think that you prefer our dull place to that gay château de Jussac."

"Indeed I do," very decisively replied Nathalie. But Aunt Radegonde's penetration was not to be thus deceived, and she saw, she said, through her young friend's kind-hearted ruse. It was evening when they reached the château; Madame Marceau was unwell in her room.

"Then we shall spend the evening together in my boudoir," said the Canoness with a little selfish joy; "will you wait for me there, Petite, whilst I go up to Rosalie's room? If Armand should come, tell him he is not to go without seeing me; keep him in conversation."

Nathalie went up to the boudoir. She found every thing familiar and cheerful looking, and felt glad to be come back; it seemed as if she had been, not a few days, but a whole month away. The door opened; she started, but it was only Amanda, who came in for some trifling purpose, and seemed delighted to see mademoiselle once more. Nathalie heard her abstractedly, and felt relieved when she left. About ten minutes elapsed, the door opened again; this time Nathalie did not look up from her work.

"How industrious you are already," said the voice of Aunt Radegonde.

Nathalie looked up slowly; the Canoness was alone. She had found her niece very unwell; nothing serious, of course, still it was very provoking, for it would delay her intended journey to Paris for a month or six weeks; such was the doctor's decision. Then followed a long dissertation on illness in general, and on two or three very remarkable illnesses with which the Canoness had been afflicted, and during which she had been attended by Doctor Montolieu. Nathalie heard her with such evident abstraction, that Aunt Radegonde ended by noticing it.

"I cannot imagine what is the matter with you to-night," she said, a little pettishly; "you start and jump in a very peculiar way. Are you nervous? I hope not, for when Rosalie is gone we shall have a lonely life of it; and if every sound fidgets you so, what will you do in the long winter evenings, without even Armand to come in and talk for an hour?"

"Will Monsieur de Sainville accompany Madame Marceau?" she asked.

"Accompany her, Petite! Why did I not tell you? How forgetful you are; I am sure I told you."

"You told me nothing," said Nathalie, laying down her work.

"What! I did not say Armand was gone?"

"Gone! No, Marraine, you did not."

"Well, he is gone, Petite; gone for the winter; gone to Spain, I believe. I dare say he will come back next spring, or next summer at the latest. Indeed, if you can only get over your nervousness, we shall have a very quiet and comfortable winter."

Nathalie looked thoughtful, and worked on in silence.

The winter set in early. It was as the Canoness had predicted, extremely quiet. Madame Marceau brooded over her disappointments in her own room, whence she seldom emerged. At length she took her departure for Paris, where the elegant Amanda accompanied her. The Canoness and the young girl remained alone in the château, with the servants; and never did solitude weigh so heavily on Nathalie.

Amongst the "wrongs of women," few are really more heavy and insupportable than the forced inactivity to which they are condemned in all the life, fire, and energy of youth. That thirst for pleasure, for which they are so much reproved, is only the thirst for excitement and action. They are social prisoners, and, like the enchanted princesses of fairy tales, they look down from the high and inaccessible tower of their solitude on the life and action ever going on beneath them, but in which they must never hope to join. Some, timid and shrinking, love their sheltering captivity; by far the greater number hate it in their hearts, yet, obedient to necessity, grow either apathetic or resigned: a few, more daring, or rendered reckless, break through their bonds, and throw themselves into the social strife; but for one who wins the shore, how many perish miserably!

Ennui, in all its dreariness, now fell on Nathalie. She regretted the school of Mademoiselle Dantin. There she had to struggle and act;—she lived. But here it seemed as if the shadow of more than monastic stillness had suddenly fallen upon her existence. No visitors came to the château, in the absence of its master. Once, Madame de Jussac called; she looked slightly disconcerted on hearing that Monsieur de Sainville was gone. Nathalie longed for an invitation similar to that which she had formerly so little valued; but Madame de Jussac left without opening her lips on that subject, and, indeed, without uttering more than a few smooth phrases. She returned no more.

In the long winter evenings, when Aunt Radegonde slept, or indulged in monotonous speech, Nathalie thought of Monsieur de Sainville, and followed him in his southern wanderings with something like envy. Why was he free as air, whilst she was condemned to waste her youth, and perhaps all her existence, in this forced repose? The only thing that did her good was to take long solitary walks in the garden and grounds. She came in cold and fatigued, but at least relieved for a while of the superfluous energy which oppressed her, and made stillness of mind and body a sort of inexpressible torment. Three months thus passed away.

Madame Marceau had been gone a few weeks, when, on a bleak afternoon, Nathalie went out for her daily walk, in spite of all the remonstrances of the Canoness. She remained out about two hours, and re-entered the house as evening set in. She proceeded, as usual, to the *boudoir* of Aunt Radegonde. The lamp was unlit; but the wood fire burned with a soft and subdued glow. The young girl liked this quiet time; for then the Canoness slept, and allowed Nathalie to wander away in her inner world of thought. She now softly closed the door, came in on tip-toe, went up to the window, allowed the curtains to fall in heavy folds, which excluded the glimmering twilight, listened for a while at the back of Aunt Radegonde's arm-chair, and, concluding from the stillness there that its tenant slept, quietly glided around it to her place,—a low seat, on the other side of the fire; then, leaning her forehead on her hand, she looked at the burning embers, and fell into a deep fit of musing. She thought of sunny Spain,—of barren plains, wild valleys, and old Moorish cities, where all night long were heard the sounds of dance and serenade.

"Have you got a head-ache?" asked a well-known voice.

She did not start, look up, or turn round; she remained in the same attitude, as if arrested thus by the power of enchantment.

"I am sure you are not well, Petite," continued the voice, now sounding like that of Aunt Radegonde.

"And I am sure, that though you change your voice, and call me Petite, you are not Marraine!" cried Nathalie, eagerly bending forward; but the arm-chair stood in the shade, and she could not see. "No matter," she impatiently added, "I know very well who you are. There! I see you now!" she triumphantly exclaimed, as a flickering light arose, and displayed the smiling face of Monsieur de Sainville, who now occupied his aunt's arm-chair, facing Nathalie. The flame also lit up her features; she looked more than glad; she seemed delighted. He amused himself for a few moments in watching her changing face, as changing as the wavering light which fell on it now. "So you are really come back!" she said, rubbing her little hands with evident glee, and not seeming in the least to think it necessary to hide the pleasure she felt at Monsieur de Sainville's return.

"Yes, I am really come back," he replied; and he did not look displeased at the evident gratification his return afforded to the young girl. It was, to say the truth, something new in his experience, to see a face brightening through his unexpected presence.

Nathalie shook her head, laughed a gay short laugh, rose abruptly, walked up and down the room, came back to her seat, and allowing herself to fall down upon it with negligent grace, said gayly:

"I am so glad!"

"Glad of what?" he asked, as if willing to indulge himself for once in the pleasure of this *naïve* flattery.

"Glad that you are come back, sir."

"Indeed! why so, my child!" he slowly asked.

"Because I am half dead with *ennui!*"

"Candid confession!" he exclaimed, looking, and feeling, perhaps, a little piqued.

"Indeed, sir, it is candid. If *ennui* could kill, I should be quite dead."

"And how do you know I shall dissipate yours?"

"Oh! *Mon Dieu!*" cried Nathalie, looking much dismayed, "you are going away again?"

"No, not this winter, at least."

She looked much relieved.

"So you suffered from *ennui?*" he said.

She shook her head, and gave a rueful sigh. He smiled, and said, "Poor child!" but his smile was not very compassionate, as he asked her "what sort of an *ennui* it was?"

"A desperate *ennui*, sir; something quite overpowering that took hold of me in the morning, and did not leave me at night."

"You found the château dull, I suppose?"

"I found it empty, sir."

"Do you know," he resumed, after a brief pause, "that you must have good nerves? You did not seem a bit frightened—scarcely startled, on finding me here so unexpectedly."

"Because I knew your voice at the very first word you uttered; besides, it did not seem so strange that you should be there. I was thinking of you, of you and Spain. Oh, sir, do tell me something about it. Is it a fine country? Do you like the Spanish women? Are they so very pretty? Did you see them dance?"

"I came back through your Arles," he replied, without answering her rapid questioning.

"Arles! you came through Arles! Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

There was emotion in her voice. Without seeming to heed it, he rang for the light.

"And how did Arles look?" asked Nathalie, when the servant was gone.

"I could see no change."

But Nathalie was not content. She questioned him minutely; he answered patiently, and gave her every detail she desired, yet each reply made her look more thoughtful and more sad. When she had no more to ask, and he no more to say, she gave a deep sigh, and remained silent. Monsieur de Sainville now stood near the table, unfastening a little osier basket which he had brought with him.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said he, turning towards her, "do come and look at something I have brought from my travels."

She rose and approached, without seeming much interested. He asked her to guess the contents of the basket. She looked at it; turned round it, came back to her place, and shook her head, and said she did not know. He smiled, and bade her raise the lid. She promptly obeyed, for her curiosity was somewhat roused; to her surprise, she saw nothing but green moss.

"Look beneath," said he.

She raised the moss, and beneath it, enshrined in another bed of moss which they perfumed, she perceived a bouquet of such flowers as the late season afforded. She looked up rather disappointed.

"They are for you," he quietly observed.

"For me, sir!" she exclaimed with a quick searching look.

"Yes; have you no idea where they come from?"

"They come from Arles." she replied, in a low tone.

She raised the bunch of flowers from their mossy bed, softly and silently, without one of the exclamations of pleasure Monsieur de Sainville had expected; looked at them for a few moments, and they seemed as fresh as if newly gathered by the hand which held them: then bent over them, silently still.

"Well!" he at length observed, "do they look genuine?"

She slowly raised her head, and looked up into his face, as he stood by her side; her face was covered with tears.

"Oh, sir," she said, "how shall I thank you?"

He smiled, a little sadly, at her emotion; he loved Sainville; but the fountain from which flew such tears had long run dry for him.

"If you only knew where I had procured these flowers," he observed, after a pause.

"What! are they not from Arles?"

"Yes, but from what garden of Arles?"

Her color came and went; she gave him a troubled look full of inquiry, but his face remained impenetrable. At length she faltered out that "she could not tell—she did not know."

"Well, it was only in the garden of a little house that stands apart somewhere in the suburbs. There is an old stone bench just by the porch; and in the garden behind the house is a little fountain, with laurels around it."

"My aunt's house!—our house!—the house where I was born!" cried Nathalie. "*Oh, mon Dieu!*"

She seemed unable to say more.

"Oh, sir!" she at length added, "what have I done that you should be so very kind to me?"

She raised the flowers to her lips, and held out her hand to him; he took it and seemed to enjoy her pleasure. But when this emotion had subsided she questioned him eagerly. By what chance had he discovered that house;—for it was by chance, of course? She remembered mentioning it to him once, still she did not suppose he had taken the trouble to find it out, for it was not easy to find! She seemed so confident that it was all the result of chance that he looked slightly disconcerted, and allowed her to remain in that belief,—which did not seem, however, to lessen her gratitude in the least. Indeed, she was renewing her thanks with southern vivacity and fervor, when the door opened and Aunt Radegonde entered. Nathalie eagerly ran up to her, and told her the story of the bouquet. "How kind it was of Monsieur de Sainville to bring those flowers to her, and what an extraordinary chance had made him enter the very house where she and her aunt lived at Arles." The Canoness heard Nathalie without uttering a word, and gave her nephew an astonished look, which he did not seem to heed.

"Yes," she said abstractedly; "it is very peculiar, as you say, Petite."

She sat down in her arm-chair and looked musingly at the fire, whilst Nathalie left the room to put her flowers in water. Monsieur de Sainville, with his usual restlessness, was walking up and down the narrow *boudoir.*

"Aunt," said he, suddenly stopping short before her, "you said Mademoiselle Montolieu was quite well;—I find her much thinner, poor little thing!"

"And if she is thin, what about it?" rather shortly asked his aunt.

"It is a great deal to me as her guardian."

The Canoness looked greatly provoked, but the entrance of Nathalie checked her reply. During her temporary absence, the Canoness had been engaged in giving orders for all the rooms devoted to her nephew's use to be aired, heated, and prepared, and especially for the dinner to be hurried as much as possible. Nathalie now brought the tidings that it was nearly ready.

"Why should we not dine up here? I like your boudoir, aunt," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Oh! how delightful it would be, Marraine," cried Nathalie.

The Canoness smiled at the idea of having a favor to grant. She pretended to hesitate a good deal and raise numerous objections, but she at length consented with much graciousness. The *boudoir* was far too small; and yet it was a pleasant meal; and when it was over, they had a very pleasant evening sitting all three around the fire. The ladies questioned Monsieur de Sainville on his travels, but he seemed to have been very little interested by what he saw, and consequently had not much to say on that score.

"Then why did you go, Armand?" asked his aunt.

"For the pleasure of coming back again, aunt; by far the most real pleasure of travelling."

Monsieur de Sainville retired early. His aunt followed him out of the room with an important air, and looked very important when she returned, in the course of a quarter of an hour

"Petite," she gravely said; "do put by your work, I want to speak to you. Petite," she resumed, as Nathalie complied with evident surprise; "reserve is a virtue highly necessary to women, and chiefly to women like us, in the unmarried state. Now, when I came in here this evening I found you standing there, with flowers in one hand, the other hand, my child, was in that of Armand. Mind, I do not say it was wrong, but it was not quite reserved."

Nathalie colored deeply, and did not reply at once.

"Marraine," she said at length, "it was an irresistible impulse, foolish perhaps, but certainly innocent. Monsieur de Sainville has been so kind to me, that I sometimes feel as if I were his child and he my father."

"I never knew any thing so absurd!" impatiently exclaimed the Canoness; "I perceive I must open your eyes as I have been opening his. He calls you 'his ward,' or 'a child,' or even 'poor little thing.' You speak of him as of an old man. Now, my dear, if both you and he labor under this great mistake, I, a woman of penetration, do not, and I feel it my duty to enlighten you; I assure you, therefore, that Armand could by no means be your father; just as I have been assuring him that you are neither a child nor a little girl."

"Oh, Marraine!" cried Nathalie, "how could you speak to him about any thing of the kind?" She looked irritated and ashamed.

"Mademoiselle Petite," dryly said the Canoness, "allow me to say, that I am not only a woman of penetration, but also a woman of discretion and reserve. Do you imagine I said any thing improper to my nephew? Do you imagine I alluded to the fact which I mentioned to you? No, indeed; but in an adroit and delicate manner I introduced your name, and hinted that though you were so childish, you were not a child, but a young and very pretty girl. He took the hint, and said quite seriously, 'I know it, Aunt.'"

A rosy blush suffused the features of Nathalie; she looked very much discomposed, whilst the Canoness continued in her usual tone:

"You see, you might have relied on my discretion, Petite. Indeed you need not have been so offended at what I said. In my time, my dear," she added, glancing at her soft white hands, "a lady's hand was a rare and precious thing to touch; and the lover admitted to kiss the tips of his lady's fingers was often overpowered by his feelings,—the favor was so great. I know that in modern times relaxations have been introduced, but *I* cannot approve the principle."

Nathalie looked up, her face was flushed, and when she spoke, she spoke quickly, and with eager warmth.

"Marraine," she said, "I know not if you have done right or wrong in speaking thus; but this I know, that—come what may—I thank you."

She rose, kissed her, and was gone.

"Docile little creature," thought the Canoness, delighted at the result of her interference; "how she will learn in time to understand the beauties of female celibacy."

Nathalie was then in her room. She had paused in the act of undressing before her mirror, and now looked with smiling eyes and parted lips at the charming image its depths revealed. Oh! wise Aunt Radegonde!

CHAPTER XVIII.

Winter was over; but the spring was cool, and a bright wood fire burned on the drawing-room hearth. Though it was evening, the lamp was still unlit, the firelight almost supplied its place; its cheerful and vivid glow extended to the furthest extremity of the room, giving warmth to the old pictures on the wall, and light to the gleaming mirrors. The windows with curtains drawn back alone looked dark, yet, beyond them shone a few pale stars in the depths of the gloomy sky, against which, more gloomy still, waved the dark trees of the avenue.

On one side of the fire-place, but with her back turned to it, sat Nathalie on her low chair. One hand supported her cheek, the other rested on a book which lay open on her lap. She was slightly bent forward in the attitude of reading, and the light which fell on the open page, also lit up her clear and well-defined profile. Monsieur de Sainville, similarly engaged, sat on the other side of the fire-place, but he faced the fire; the flickering light fell in full upon him; and whereas it gave a richer warmth and deeper coloring to the young girl's coun tenance, it only seemed to render his grave features more cold and colorless. They appeared to be alone, and neither spoke. Tired, perhaps, of the position he was compelled to assume in order to receive the light of the fire on the page he read, Monsieur de Sainville at length closed the volume and reclined back in his seat.

"Do you wish for the lamp, sir?" asked Nathalie, in a low tone, and without looking up from her book; "shall I ring for it?"

"Thank you," he replied, speaking low like her; it would only cause my sister to awaken; she likes this evening sleep."

Was Nathalie mistaken, or was there indeed something in the speaker's tone that justified the quick look she raised towards him? but his features no longer received the light from the fire, and she could not trace their meaning; hers assumed a surprised and puzzled expression as she glanced from Monsieur de Sainville to a sofa behind him. On this sofa his sister lay reclining in the more shadowy part of the room; the sound of her breathing, quick and oppressed like that of a person in sleep, was heard at a regular interval. Nathalie listened to it for a while, then rose, stepped softly across the room, and placed a screen between Madame Marceau and the fire. As she was turning away from the couch she met Monsieur de Sainville's inquiring look.

"I was afraid the light might awaken her," she simply said, and resumed her seat.

He gave her a fixed and penetrating look, then once more took up his book and previous position.

Ever since her return from Paris, that is to say, for two months, Madame Marceau had been seriously ill; but this she pertinaciously refused to acknowledge. In spite of remonstrance and entreaties, she declared that she only labored under slight indisposition; though she was compelled to keep reclining on the sofa all day long, nothing could induce her to retire to her own room; she persisted in remaining in the saloon, in order to see every one who might chance to call. Visits had never been numerous at the château of Sainville, they became less frequent every day; Madame de Jussac seldom came; yet, Madame Marceau, attired with her usual elegance, still remained in the drawing-room, ready to pay the honors of that house, of which she considered herself almost the mistress. The doctor warned, her brother remonstrated, both in vain: the sick lady shrank from taking to her bed with a feeling that resembled horror; she seemed to entertain an instinctive and unconquerable dread of acknowledging, even thus indirectly, the fatal progress disease had made.

The Canoness acted in a wholly different spirit. No sooner did the first severe cold give her a touch of rheumatism, than she clothed herself in flannel from head to foot, discovered that the drawing-room was full of draughts, retired to her little *boudoir*, and, having caused every cranny to be stopped up, and a huge fire to burn night and day in the chimney, was in a fair way of being suffocated, when both the doctor and Monsieur de Sainville fortunately interfered. But though she submitted very reluctantly to their advice, they wholly failed in persuading her that it would be possible for her to leave the *boudoir*, and not perish of cold. Nathalie's coaxing entreaties did indeed, once succeed in bringing her down to the drawing-room, but after an hour's stay she went up in a shivering fit, declaring with some asperity, that unless there were a conspiracy against her life, no one would after this trial, think of asking her to come down again; which of course no one did. When she first determined on remaining in her *boudoir*, Aunt Radegonde imagined that Nathalie would be with her constantly; but Madame Marceau had since her return conceived so great an affection for the young girl, that she could not bear to have her out of her sight; she now called her "Petite," like her aunt; treated her with a kind familiarity, wholly free from patronage; and insisted on the exclusive possession of her society, to the great chagrin of Aunt Radegonde, who was thus obliged to be satisfied with the companionship of Amanda.

The elegant *femme-de-chambre*, whose life had been spent with *la fleur des pois* of the French *noblesse*, felt wounded in her artistic pride. Was it because she condescended to receive a salary, that her talents were to remain idle? Why she was losing her lightness and delicacy of touch with every day's inaction! This indirect appeal to Madame Marceau's sense of justice produced an increase in the yearly sum which Mademoiselle Amanda was in the habit of receiving; and which increase was considered by this experienced *coiffeuse* as a very slight compensation for the inexpressible damage she sustained in thus doing nothing. To say the truth, she was not quite so inactive as she chose to appear, since she had succeeded in persuading Nathalie to accept of her daily services; by which means she had not only kept her hand in, but also relieved herself of a great superfluity of speech; lamenting her fate to the young girl, and appealing to "mademoiselle to know whether the château had not become insufferably dull?"

The château was, indeed, any thing but a gay sojourn; but though she was thus secluded from every society, save that of its owners, Nathalie did not find this monotony wearisome. A time had been when she would have shrunk with terror and *ennui* from so monastic an existence; but now she found a soothing charm in its very regularity and tranquil tenor. She liked, since Madame Marceau had become kind, without condescension, to sit with her, read and play to her, to secretly perform for her those little offices which the sick lady would not, in her pride, acknowledge that she needed, but with which she could not dispense; she liked even those dull and silent evenings by the fireside, whilst Madame Marceau slept,—evenings which, though so quiet, had yet a dreamy charm of their own.

The room was again silent; the fire was burning low; Monsieur de Sainville stooped to arrange it; a broad jet of flame arose, and shed its light on Nathalie and her book; but, as if this light annoyed him, he drew back into the shade.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said he, in a low tone, "do you ever go to the garden now?"

Nathalie started slightly; but, without looking up from her book, she replied in the same key:

"Not often, sir."

"I thought so. In the first place, I never see you there; in the second, you have looked pale of late. Pray take a little exercise; and pray," he added, after a pause, "do not read thus by fire-light; it is bad for the sight."

Nathalie neither answered nor looked up; but a furtive smile trembled on her lips.

"I know what you mean," he continued; "but you are mistaken. I was not reading this evening; I read a page—no more; nor, to say the truth, do I imagine that you have been reading much yourself. For the last week, I have noticed the progress of your marker through the philosophical treatise in your hands; you have travelled exactly twelve pages, which makes less than two pages an evening."

Nathalie hastily closed the volume.

"Now," resumed Monsieur de Sainville, "if you were not so proud, you would long ago have asked me for something to read more interesting than that Jansenist Nicole. Since you do not seem to be aware of it, I assure you I have a well-stocked library, and if you will only——"

"Armand," feebly said the voice of Madame Marceau, "why are you in the dark?"

"Lest the lamp should annoy you, Rosalie; we will have it lit now."

He rang the bell as he spoke; the servant entered; and the lamp was lit.

"And you actually remained in the dark all this time, on my account?" resumed Madame Marceau, addressing her brother, who now stood by her couch, in the same languid tone.

"The room was not dark," said he, very briefly.

"True; beside you were always fond of sitting thus by the fire-side. Do not these evenings remind you of other evenings long ago, Armand?"

"Do you feel better?" abruptly asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"Much better; these evening slumbers compensate for my bad nights; and did I not fear they inconvenienced you——"

"If they did, I could leave the room."

"But it is like your kindness to stay. Dear Armand!" and Madame Marceau pressed the hand of her brother very gratefully. "Oh! and you, too, stayed, *chère* Petite," she added, addressing Nathalie in a tone of surprise, and half-raising herself on one elbow to look at the young girl; "I thought you were gone to see my poor aunt, whilst I slept."

Monsieur de Sainville looked at his sister; the light of the lamp fell on her pale features, over which now lingered a forced smile that agreed little with the dark, feverish, and yet eager gleam of her sunken eyes. From her he glanced to Nathalie; the same light fell on her countenance: she, too, was pale, but of the pallor that gives a more delicate and subdued grace. She had risen on being thus addressed, and now stood opposite him at the foot of the sick lady's couch, eyeing her with a kind, compassionate glance, and smiling, as she answered, quietly:

"I never imagined you would sleep so long; but I am truly glad you did sleep: it will do you so much good."

"Yes, Petite, it will," slowly answered Madame Marceau; she gently drew Nathalie towards her, made her sit down on the edge of the sofa, and taking her hand, clasped it tenderly in hers, without seeming aware that by so doing she placed it almost in her brother's hand, which she still detained. Monsieur de Sainville, who was eyeing the fire with a fixed and abstracted gaze, never moved or turned round. Nathalie looked somewhat disconcerted, and rose quickly.

"Had I not better go and see how your aunt is?" she asked.

"Yes, Petite, she will be very glad to see you."

The look of Madame Marceau followed the young girl out of the room; her brother never changed his attitude: the expression of his features was severe, and almost forbidding.

"She is my good angel," sighed his sister. He did not answer. "Do you not think so, Armand?" she added after a pause.

"Think what, Rosalie?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, slowly turning round, and eyeing her quietly.

"Does that lamp annoy you?" he added, as she shaded her eyes with her hand; "shall I move the screen?"

"If you please; the light is painfully bright."

"Well, Rosalie, what were you saying?"

"I was only talking about Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"And what of her?"

"She is a good child."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, indeed, Armand, I do," said Madame Marceau, turning quickly her pale eager face towards her brother.

"Well, so do I," he calmly answered.

There was a pause. Monsieur de Sainville had resumed his book; Madame Marceau was tossing restlessly on her couch.

"Armand," she said, at length, "you like frankness, do you not?"

"I do," was the emphatic reply.

"You will, therefore, not be offended at a plain question?"

"No, Rosalie, certainly not."

"Well, then, Armand, how do you like Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

"Very much," was the unhesitating reply.

Madame Marceau looked at her brother, and gave a sigh of relief.

"I am so glad—so very glad," she said, laying some stress on the word 'glad,' "because you see, I feared quite the contrary;—indeed, I decidedly thought the contrary. I imagined that you found her light, frivolous, and capricious; that you even thought her more heedless than her youth warrants: that you, so calm and grave, saw with displeasure those little manifestations of temper to which she is subject. I cannot tell you how glad I am to find that I was mistaken, which I was—was I not?"

"You certainly were mistaken."

"Well, Armand, you always spoke so very coldly to her."

"I am of a cold temperament."

"And rather severe. Now, I think the faults of a young girl ought to be treated with indulgence."

"Quite true," quietly replied Monsieur de Sainville; "severity toward youth is cruel."

"Besides," resumed his sister, "what are the faults of temper, when the heart is good?"

"Nothing, indeed."

"Then you think she has faults of temper?" quickly said Madame Marceau.

"I never said so, Rosalie. You remarked, 'What are faults of temper, when the heart is good?' I replied, 'Nothing, indeed.'"

Madame Marceau pressed her hand to her forehead; she looked thoughtful.

"Nothing," she resumed; "and yet, Armand, in a wife, for instance, temper is no trifle."

"Trifle!" seriously said Monsieur de Sainville; "it is the very first thing to be studied."

"Do you think so?" inquired his sister, with an anxious look; "is that your real opinion, Armand?"

"My conscientious opinion, Rosalie," was the grave reply.

"And beauty. What do you think about beauty?"

"In what sense do you mean?"

"Why, beauty in a wife; do you think it a recommendation?"

"It is an open question; I have known men who would not marry a woman that was too handsome; others who would have none but a pretty wife."

"Do you think Petite too handsome?"

"No, certainly not."

"And yet she is very pretty, Armand?"

"Precisely; that is why I do not think her too handsome."

"Well, I must say I do not admire her unconditionally."

"Nor do I."

"She is very dark."

"She is decidedly dark."

"And that curl in her lip,—what does it mean?"

"Pride."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"But pride is a great sin?" said Madame Marceau, with a look of concern.

"One of the seven capital sins."

Madame Marceau shook her head and sighed.

"*Mon Dieu!* Armand," she gravely said, "you intrude a painful doubt on my mind; faults of temper, beauty, and pride, are dangerous gifts, and form a dangerous dowry."

"Do you think so?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, with his peculiar smile.

"You think so, Armand, do you not?" said his sister, turning towards him with an inquiring glance.

"Not in the least."

"Then I must have misunderstood you!"

"Quite misunderstood me, Rosalie."

"Then, Armand, what do you think?" she asked, with some asperity; "but, perhaps," she added, in a smoother tone, "you object to this question?"

"Not at all, I assure you. You say that temper, beauty, and pride, are a dangerous dowry; I do not think so: temper produces a piquant variety; beauty is pleasant; pride is irresistibly attractive."

"Well, to be sure, how I did misunderstand you!" observed Madame Marceau, using her vinaigrette, and speaking with a short laugh; "I quite thought you had said temper was the very first thing to be studied."

"Precisely,—studied; I did not say avoided. No man has a right to expect that his wife shall be a mere machine; let him, therefore, study her temper."

"And you do not think beauty dangerous?"

"I pity the man that thinks so; I pity the man who, being free to choose between two women, equal in other respects, has not the heart to choose the handsomer one of the two."

"It would be very generous to take the plain one," ironically said the lady.

"It would be heroic, if done from a generous motive; mean and paltry, if the act of fear."

"And you do not object to pride?" continued Madame Marceau.

"I do not, when it is tempered by gentler feelings; it may indeed, lead to much that is foolish, but it also saves from much that is false and wrong."

Madame Marceau did not answer; she had partly raised herself on her couch; a heap of cushions supported her; she looked flushed, and fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

"I misunderstood, quite misunderstood," she said, very briefly; "it was my fault, no doubt, but still I perceive that I have been in the dark all along."

Monsieur de Sainville turned quietly round, and eyed his sister with a grave and earnest glance.

"I think," he quietly observed, "that you have at least been questioning me in the dark; the exact purport of your questions has so often escaped me, that I may have answered them imperfectly. I am sorry that I did not at first state plainly what I am going to state now."

His sister said nothing, but she slowly turned round, and eyed him with a fixed and burning look; he continued, looking at her as he spoke:

"Namely, that although I recognize in no person the right of questioning me, yet I am perfectly willing to answer any such questions as it shall please you to address me, and I beforehand give you my word that, no matter what the subject may be, the answers shall be as full and explicit as even you can desire."

Madame Marceau sank back on her seat, turned very pale, and applied her vinaigrette. Her brother took no notice of her emotion, which subsided almost immediately. Far from seeming to wish to avail herself of the privilege awarded to her, she hastily exclaimed,—

"My dear Armand, what new mistake is this? Is it possible you imagine me so indiscreet? I have, indeed, been mistaken, but very agreeably so. We agree where I thought we differed,—a true source of pleasure to me, for every day adds to my affection for Petite."

She spoke with some warmth. He rose, and said quietly:

"Then you have no question to ask of me?"

"None, Armand; none," was the hurried reply.

He left the room.

Five minutes had scarcely elapsed, when Nathalie entered. She looked at Madame Marceau; the lady was reclining in her old attitude. The screen shaded her face; Nathalie could not see whether she really slept or not. She concluded that she did, from her silence. Her step was light, and could scarcely be heard as she glided across the carpeted floor to resume her place; but instead of doing so, she paused near the table, within the brilliant circle of light shed by the lamp. The volume Monsieur de Sainville had been reading attracted her attention; she opened it: it was a collection of treatises on subjects of agriculture, commerce, and political economy. The young girl turned over a few pages, then laid down the volume, with that curl of the lip which had attracted the notice of Madame Marceau. Her own book was lying near it; she also took it up; it opened at the last page she had been reading. She looked at it with a fixed, abstracted gaze,—scarcely the gaze of one who read; a faint tinge of color rose to her cheek, and something like a smile broke over her features. At length, she closed the volume, and, turning round, beheld the pale face and glittering eyes of Madame Marçeau looking at her over the screen. She could not repress a start; for though she often met that look, rendered more keen and fixed by the illness of her who gazed, it ever produced in her the same first impression of uneasiness,—an impression which she always inwardly reproved when it had subsided.

"I thought you were asleep," said she, approaching the couch.

"No, I was not," was the low reply.

"Do you feel unwell?" continued Nathalie; for the sick lady was ghastly pale.

"I am not well. I was looking at you: what were you reading?"

"Nicole's Moral Essays."

"Do you like it?"

Nathalie smiled demurely.

"No favorite, I see. Come and sit here, Petite, so that I may see you;—yes, so," she added, as Nathalie sat down on the edge of her couch; and the sick lady caressingly took one of the young girl's hands in both her own, and looked fixedly at the frank and open face before her. "You are fond of reading?" she resumed.

"Very fond indeed."

"And of reading by the fire-light: it is pleasant, is it not? Well, what are you looking at?" she added, as Nathalie turned round somewhat abruptly.

"Is not that fire burning low, madame?"

"But the room is warm, Petite; you surely do not feel cold, for you look quite flushed."

Nathalie did not reply.

"Armand likes it, too," abstractedly continued Madame Marceau; "as I dare say you have observed," she added, after a pause.

"No," hesitatingly replied Nathalie; "I had not observed, —I—I did not know."

"What! am I mistaken? Does he not sit reading there every evening?"

"I mean, madame, that I did not know Monsieur de Sainville liked it."

"He does, Petite,—he does," said the lady, in a low tone; "if he did not, would he stay here as he stays, evening after evening?"

Nathalie did not answer: she scarcely seemed to have heard Madame Marceau. She still sat on the edge of the couch; her left hand held by the sick lady, her right supporting her cheek; her look fastened on the fire, which, notwithstanding her previous assertion, burned brightly, and seemed not on the point of dying away. She looked as she probably felt,—in a dreamy, abstracted, yet not unhappy mood,—the mood in which youth welcomes its bright fancies and still brighter hopes. The voice of Madame Marceau, always rich and harmonious, now strikingly so, and yet not without a touch of secret sadness, broke on her reverie.

"It is a deep charm, that of old associations—deep, and yet sometimes exquisitely painful. I know not why a thought, or rather a remembrance, of the past has been haunting me the whole evening, ever since I awoke, and found the lamp unlit, and Armand sitting there reading by the fire-light, and as I had seen him many a time long ago; for it is with him an old and favorite habit."

Nathalie looked up silently, but listened, as if bound by a spell.

"Years have passed away, but the charm is still unbroken; the old habit endures. The hearth, that to others looks joyous and bright, is to me as a spot haunted for ever by a secret presence. Is it harsh to wish that the dead should be forgotten, and effaced from human memory? Yet, if I could, I would do this; and had I the power, the fabled Lethe should yield its deepest draught, and quench the fever of one wearied spirit."

She no longer seemed to be addressing Nathalie, and spoke in a tone so low, that the young girl could scarcely catch the last words, though, slightly bending forward, she listened with eager attention. She looked round, and gave Madame Marceau a searching but unavailing glance; the meaning of that face was not one she could read. There was a long silence. At length, Nathalie left the couch, drew a chair to the table, and resumed her book; but after reading a few pages with feverish haste, she closed the volume and took up her embroidery. It failed, however, in rivetting her attention; for ere long, she laid it by, rose from her seat, and went up to one of the window recesses. After remaining there some time, she returned to the fire-side, and standing on the hearth-rug, looked long and fixedly at the burning logs of wood. When she turned round, she again met the look of Madame Marceau, who seemed to be eyeing her attentively.

"Petite," she softly said, "you do not look well this evening. I fear this is a very dull life you lead here. Alas! what has youth to do with those who have unhappily lost all sympathy with its feelings. My poor child! we are too old, too grave, too sorrowful for you."

"Too sorrowful, madame?" said Nathalie with a faint smile, but a somewhat wistful and anxious glance.

"Yes, Petite, too sorrowful," gravely replied the lady.

Nathalie looked at her almost inquiringly, but Madame Marceau averted her glance and spoke no more. She retired early, supported out of the room by Amanda, and leaving the young girl alone as usual.

It was a habit she had taken since the illness of Madame Marceau; there was for her a charm, deep, though undefined, in the solitary possession of that old drawing-room, where no one ever came after the sick lady had retired. In order to secure herself against intrusion, Nathalie had even asked and obtained, that the task of extinguishing the lamp, and of allowing the fire to die slowly away on the hearth, might be left to her care.

The most sociable minds, those whom the quick animated converse delights most, often turn to solitude, with feverish and impassioned longing. There was to Nathalie something painfully oppressive in the constant society of Madame Marceau. It was not that the lady spoke much, or that her discourse wearied—far from it; she spoke little and seldom, on trite subjects; but she was there, ever there, with her quick restless look still following every motion of her young companion; and there came moments when Nathalie longed to be away, when she thought of dark and lonely places, as a prisoner thinks of escape and liberty—when her spirit literally thirsted for an hour's communion with solitude. When that hour came at length, she enjoyed it with a pleasure only the more keen from being so brief. There was an old arm-chair, vast enough to contain her entirely; she ensconced herself in its deep recesses, extinguished the lamp, buried her head in her hands, and listened to the dull monotonous sound of the winter rain pattering against the window-panes, or to the spirit-voice of the wind, now low and deep like a stifled plaint, now rising loud and wrathful, as if holding angry contest with some foe like itself, mysterious and unseen. Sometimes a strange and not unpleasing fear came over the mind of the young girl: she looked up chill and shivering; the fire was low, the room looked vast and indistinct, the ceiling seemed lost in its own height, the mirrors opened deep vistas into endless and mysterious chambers, extending far away, all filled with the same solemn and shadowy gloom. But Nathalie was not superstitious; this obscurity awed but never terrified her; she was indeed conscious of a slight degree of fear, but of a fear which she subdued and which there was even a certain pleasure in thus subduing. Gradually the feeling vanished; she thought no longer of falling rain or murmuring wind, of shadowy chambers and legendary lore, but she listened invariably to the wonderful and endless romance, which her own thoughts had framed from the dreams that haunt the brain and trouble the heart of longing and ardent youth. And every evening that tale, with its imaginary scenes, passions, and characters, became more deep and thrilling; but on none did it seem to draw nearer to a close, as vague and mysterious as the unknown future it shadowed forth to the dreaming girl.

But this evening was not spent like the rest: the lamp was not extinguished, the chair was not drawn forth. Nathalie sat on the couch where Madame Marceau had been reclining, and her look wandered slowly over the whole room, as if it were a place that look beheld for the first time. This quiet *salon* was very old; it had known many guests—masters they might call themselves, and be called by others,—but what were they, save the guests of a few years, who silently departed one by one, to be replaced by other guests, whose sojourn was as brief, whose memory was as speedily forgotten? This had been the scene of their chief passion—vanity and pride; chief, but not all, for surely many a story of man's gentler feelings was linked with that old room, with that silent hearth near which Nathalie now sat, a lonely and dependent girl. She shaded her eyes with her hand; broken words, whose meaning she had divined, hints which she had been apt to read, had long ago told her a tale which her own thoughts had since then repeated to her many a time, seldom so forcibly as now. A picture rose before her, greeting that inward eye, which may be the torment, as well as the bliss, of solitude; and never did limner's art draw outlines more distinct, or paint hues more vivid. She saw the old hearth: the fire burned brightly; it cast its changing light to the furthest end of the room—it illumed its deepest recesses; but above all, it fell on two,—a youth and maiden, who both sat near it. Nathalie knew that pale and severe face, even though it was younger than now, with fewer lines of care on its brow. and something more kindly in its glance. And the maiden, too, she knew; for her features, though never beheld by actual sight, were not yet unknown. She knew that serene brow, shaded by fair clustering hair; those soft blue eyes, those parted and smiling lips, that neck of swan-like grace; and never, as she sat there in the firelight glow, did fairer and more ideal vision greet a lover's enamored gaze. Nor did he, who now looked on her, seem cold or unmoved; words fell from his lips—words which she who looked on could never hear, strive as she would, but whose meaning she read in the maiden's downcast look and blushing cheek. Here the dream ceased abruptly

"I believe I have forgotten my book," said a calm voice.

Nathalie looked up with a sudden start; it was Monsieur de Sainville, who had entered unheard, and now stood near the table on which lay the book he had been reading. He took it up, opened it, and marked some passages with a pencil. The perfect seriousness of his manner, as he stood there, wholly wrapped in his occupation, and without so much as looking towards her, at once restored Nathalie to composure. He at length closed the book, turned away from the table, but had not gone away more than a few paces, when he came back again, and said:

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, I have a favor to ask of you."

Nathalie looked up.

"A favor, sir?"

"Yes, a favor; but you must promise beforehand to grant it."

"No promise is needed, sir," she ceremoniously replied; "since it must be something quite out of my power for me not to gratify you."

"Well, then," said he, without seeming to heed her reserved manner, "promise me that you will not remain so closely confined to this room as you have done of late. I have noticed with concern the change in your appearance; you are now habitually pale, which is not natural to you: you are extremely pale this evening. Pray be careful; it is at your age that the seeds of future disease are often unconsciously sown,—that the health, grace, and bloom of youth are often lost for ever."

"But I assure you, sir," hesitatingly replied Nathalie, "that I am not ill."

"No, you are not; I know it: but you are preparing for ill health. When do you leave this room? seldom or ever. I want your promise, your word, that this shall not continue."

Nathalie did not answer.

"What! do you refuse?"

"No, sir."

"Then will you give me your word to take a walk to-morrow?"

"Very well, sir; I give you my word that I will."

She spoke in a low tone, without raising her look or changing her attitude; nor did he glance towards her. He stood on the hearth-rug, one elbow leaning on the low marble mantelshelf; his look fixed on the mirror, which gave back the whole room from its furthest extremity to the motionless figure of the young girl. He eyed her thus somewhat thoughtfully. He was not in error, when he said that Nathalie was changed; she had grown both thin and pale, and as she sat there, the drooping languor of her attitude struck him forcibly. An anxious expression overspread his features; he seemed on the point of addressing her, when something he saw in the mirror attracted his attention.

"Come in," said he, so abruptly, that Nathalie looked up at once.

He had turned towards the door; the contraction of his brow, though slight, yet announced displeasure, as the door opened and admitted Amanda.

"Why did you not come in at once?" he briefly asked.

"I was afraid of disturbing monsieur," replied Amanda, ever cool and self-possessed.

"Is madame Marceau unwell?" inquired Nathalie, rising

"No; madame was not worse, thank heaven. Madame had only left her vinaigrette, and sent her for it, lest she should want it in the night."

But the vinaigrette, though sought for every where in and under the couch, was not to be found.

"*Mon Dieu!*" observed Amanda, with great simplicity, "I should not wonder if it were in madame's room after all."

Another fruitless search convinced the *femme de chambre* that such was the case, and with a neat little apology for her intrusion, she left the room. From the moment of her entrance Monsieur de Sainville had resumed his book, and he did not look up, either during the search, or after Amanda's departure. Nathalie, who felt slightly embarrassed by the continuance of his presence, resumed the search—which was not, however, very sincere—for the missing vinaigrette.

"Do not give yourself useless trouble," said Monsieur de Sainville, quietly looking up, "I now remember, that when I left my sister's room before coming down here to look for this book, I saw that vinaigrette lying on her dressing-table. Amanda will see it the first thing on going in."

Nathalie gave him a quick look of surprise, but his countenance was perfectly calm and composed: he closed his book and continued—

"I hope you will not forget your promise."

"No, sir, I shall not."

He bade her good evening, then suddenly came back, and observed:

"But pray do not take too long a walk, Mademoiselle Montolieu; you are not very strong; besides, it is air, not fatigue, that you want."

He was gone; the door closed behind him; his receding step was heard, then ceased; but Nathalie did not move from the spot where she stood, wrapped in a dream-like trance. She pressed her hand to her forehead, and sought to recall the picture his entrance had broken; but the outlines were indistinct and dim—the hues had faded away. Instead of the youth, she saw the serious, yet kind face which had looked on her awhile ago; the maiden who had seemed so fair, was now a pale vision, as colorless and dim as the past of which she formed a part. On that loveliness, erewhile so bright, had fallen the dark Lethe-like shadow of forgetfulness and the grave.

CHAPTER XIX.

The following morning was mild and sunny, and no sooner had Nathalie entered the drawing-room, than Madame Marceau said so, and urged her to take a walk. "It would do her so much good."

Nathalie assented with some surprise at the unusual attention. Scarcely had she left the room, when Monsieur de Sainville received a message from his sister, who wished to speak to him. When he came, she apologized in a tone of concern, "for interfering with his morning walk, for she knew this was his hour; but she wished to speak to him on a matter of interest;" and again she apologized "for preventing his morning walk."

"As I am going to Marmont, it is of no consequence," said he, taking a seat and assuming a listening attitude.

But the communication Madame Marceau had to make to her brother will appear afterwards.

Before proceeding to the garden, Nathalie called on her old friend. She found her disconsolate and shivering by the fire-side.

"What a mild, sunny morning!" cheerfully said Nathalie.

"Mild! All the mild weather was gone for ever. The world was getting older every day, and as for the sun——"

Nathalie interrupted her by drawing back the curtain, and the sun poured in a light so radiant, and a warmth so genial and penetrating, that the Canoness, fairly beaten on that point, retrenched herself within the position, "that the world was growing older and older every day."

Nathalie placed on the little table, by Aunt Radegonde's arm-chair, a vase full of fresh spring flowers; mute yet eloquent protests of the ever-renewed life and freshness of nature.

"They will die," said the Canoness; "every thing must die; it is not only older the world gets, but more dismal every day."

Nathalie began to sing a gay Provençal song,—gay, yet not without a touch of old romance. The sounds stirred the emulation of Aunt Radegonde's canary, which raised its voice in loud and angry rivalry. Amused at the contest, Nathalie quickened her singing; but the faster she sang, the faster did the canary pour forth his notes in brilliant succession, until at length the Provençal song was finished, and, in his own esteem, the bird remained victor.

"There!" cried Nathalie, turning her flushed face and sparkling eyes towards the Canoness; "the sunshine, the flowers, the very bird himself bears witness against you."

"Oh! Petite, it is you, who are better than sunshine, flowers, or bird in a house," the Canoness observed; and the unnatural gloom which had of late overcast her features, gradually left them as she looked at the young girl, with her brow so clear, her look so hopeful, her smile so bright, and around her lingering still all the delightful warmth and radiance of her years. She would have added, "happy he who shall have so gay and cheerful a creature!" had she not felt checked by the memory of her anti-matrimonial exhortations

"And the book, Marraine?" coaxingly said Nathalie.

"Yes, I have looked for it, and there it is on the table. It was Armand's copy once, and he was very fond of it, as I told you; but it puzzles me to think why you care for such dry reading."

"I have long wished to read it," said Nathalie, eagerly slipping a small duodecimo into her pocket.

"Well, you may have it; I should not lend you a novel; but maxims can do you no harm."

The face of the Canoness fell when she perceived that the young girl was not going to stay; but she was comforted when Nathalie kissed her, and promised to call in the evening.

The morning was lovely, the garden looked green and beautiful, and, as Nathalie ran lightly down the gravel-walks, she wondered in her heart if Aunt Radegonde spoke truly: if the world was indeed growing old! To her it had never seemed so fresh and young as on that spring morning. After wandering a long time over the garden and the grounds, she came to the green-house. It was Monsieur de Sainville's favorite resort, but the hour for his walk was past; Nathalie, therefore, lingered there without fear of meeting him.

After admiring, leisurely, the fresh and fragrant flowers gathered together, she sat down on the low stone seat afforded by the embrasure of the arched window. It had been partly opened to admit the genial breath of noon-day to the flowers and plants within; an almond-tree growing outside intercepted the sunbeams, and threw its light waving shadow on the features of Nathalie, as she reclined back, looking idly out, watching the shadows that passed swiftly over the waving grass, and listening to the low voice of the wind passing through the rustling branches of the neighboring pine-trees.

She had not been long thus when she suddenly remembered the book she had taken away. She quickly took it out, and looked eagerly over every page; now pausing long over some passage, now passing on hastily, and still looking graver as she read. The volume which she thus perused on that spring morning was not one of those tales of love or wild romance, the delight of youth, and often, too, of maturer years, but one of the most dreary and mournful records ever yielded by the history and experience of a human heart,—the Maxims of La Rochefoucauld. A few of the maxims were underlined; three of those thus designated struck Nathalie:—

> "A man may love like a madman, not like a fool."
> "There are few women whose merit outlives their beauty."
> "True love is like spirits: spoken of by all; seen by few."

"What! still reading Nicole?" said the voice of Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie looked up; he stood smiling before her. She colored; hastily jumped down from her seat, and in her haste dropped the book. He picked it up, and immediately looked up into her face, with a glance both searching and surprised.

"La Rochefoucauld! you read La Rochefoucauld! And the copy looks well worn,—a favorite author, no doubt. Oh! you true daughter of Eve! could you not wait for such bitter fruit?"

There was slight bitterness in his tone as he spoke thus, turning over the pages of the volume. Something he saw struck him.

"Where did you get this book, child?" he asked, in a wholly altered tone.

"From Madame de Sainville, sir."

"My aunt! A strange relic for her to keep, and a strange book to lend to you." He very deliberately put the volume into his pocket, looked up, and steadily eyeing Nathalie, said, in a tone between jest and earnest:

"I confiscate La Rochefoucauld. Though this copy has not been in my hands for years, it is nevertheless my property; besides, I do not wish you to read it. For heaven's sake, keep to all that girls delight in; leave La Rochefoucauld to graver heads, older minds, and sadder hearts. Keep, I pray, to novels and poetry,—the proper food of eighteen."

A disdainful smile curled Nathalie's lip, as she replied:

"Novels, poetry, and so forth, are the sweetmeats, the *bonbons* fit for us poor girls of eighteen! How flattering!"

"You crave strong food? Be satisfied, you shall have it soon.—much too soon."

She did not answer. He continued:

"I have deprived you of your book: allow me then to send you something from my library this afternoon."

"Novels and poetry?" demurely asked Nathalie.

"Yes; novels and poetry. Do you imagine I never read either? Why, the intellectual repast must always have a dessert."

"And the dessert is, of course, fit for a girl of eighteen!" observed Nathalie, in a quick, nettled tone.

"Nay, as to that, you may have all, if you like. Do you incline towards political economy, or take any interest in agriculture? Are you pleased with statistics? Pray choose. I regret not to possess any interesting works on history. or some amusing books of travel; but I have little faith in historical lore, and have travelled too much myself to care about the travelling experiences of others. My books are thus either very grave or very light. Which do you prefer?"

"Which ever you please, sir. Some interesting discussion on the manufacturing system; or on the best method of fattening cattle; or on the present plan of cultivating land in small farms;—any thing, in short, equally instructive, elevating, or delightful."

"You are resentful. Seriously, did you like La Rochefoucauld so very much?"

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders carelessly; "she did not know; she had not read much."

"Did you wish to read more?"

She felt perfectly indifferent on that subject.

"I am glad to hear you say so. This book, true in some respects, false in others, could only taint the freshness of your mind. Had I simply warned you against it, you would have sat up all night, sooner than leave it unread. I took it into custody at once; for I know that you have too daring and inquiring a spirit to be deterred by trifles;—witness the adventure of the berries."

She did not reply She stood before him, with blushing and half-averted face; one hand supporting her cheek, the other stripping a fine laurel of its leaves. He stood between her and the door, and seemed to enjoy her embarrassment. There was a brief silence.

"What are you doing to my poor laurel?" he suddenly exclaimed.

Nathalie started, turned round, and seeing the floor covered with the leaves of the injured shrub, she looked up, with a frightened glance, into Monsieur de Sainville's face. He assumed a displeased air; and she tried to look remorseful.

"Do you use shrubs thus?" he asked; "if so, how shall I protect mine?"

"Lock the door, sir."

She glided past him, and stepped out as she spoke.

"Judicious advice, which cannot too soon be followed," he replied, following her out, and locking the door of the green-house.

Nathalie looked disconcerted, as he composedly walked by her side. In her first moment of confusion, she had not taken the path leading to the château, but a sheltered avenue of firs, in a contrary direction. The ground was bare of grass, but the fallen foliage of the firs rendered it as soft and warm as a carpet; golden gleams lit up the dark trunks and darker masses of those northern trees, in harmony with the chilliness latent in the air of a spring morning. Seeing that her companion did not speak, Nathalie resolutely opened the conversation by alluding to the beauty of the weather,—that fertile topic in doubtful climates. He smiled, but did not answer.

"There is something very pleasant in the quiet freshness of Normandy," she continued.

"You like Normandy?" said he, with a keen, inquiring glance; "you,—a native of the south, accustomed to a warm sun, and its deeper dyes;—you admire our green little province; so calm, so common-place?"

Nathalie looked surprised at this slighting tone.

"I understand," he resumed, interpreting the expression of her countenance with his usual ease; "why do I stay in a place about which I seem to care so little? Well if I remain here, it is not precisely because I like Normandy, or even Sainville, though both are endeared to me by family recollections; it is because I know, my child, that it is good for the home of man to be like his happiness,—common-place and calm. Have you read enough of La Rochefoucauld to agree with me there?"

Nathalie did not choose to answer the latter remark.

"Normandy is beautiful," she said; "yet I should prefer a purer sky and a warmer sun."

"You like the south: so do I; but not to reside in. That endless revel of nature, with skies ever blue, and air ever balm, enervates the soul. Man is not himself, when he has nothing against which he may strive. Life is not, or should not be, a day of summer sunshine, to be spent in voluptuous enjoyment. Have you never, in imagination, contrasted a soft southern climate with the desolate north, with icy seas blending at the horizon with skies scarcely less black? Have you not thought of those solitary and rock-bound shores, of those wild and barren regions seen through the falling snow; where the sun looks pale and dim as the moon of our temperate regions, where a plant can hardly grow, and man can scarcely dwell, but which have a solemn and melancholy charm that lives in the memory, when the verdant earth, the serene sky, and azure seas of the south are forgotten?"

He spoke with a fervor verging on enthusiasm.

Nathalie eyed him wistfully.

"It must be very cold there, sir," she said, with a slight shiver; "I like the sun—the sun of the south, I mean."

"That is to say, not the sun of our poor Normandy."

Nathalie did not answer.

"Now, seriously," he continued, "what is there amiss with our province? Its verdure is noted; it is a green, pleasant nook enough; and if the sky is sometimes overcast, there are plenty of dwellings to give shelter. Take Sainville, for instance; you like Sainville, do you not?" he abruptly added.

"Yes, sir," she replied, somewhat coldly; "I like it."

"But not too much, evidently. Is it the château you object to?"

"No, sir; the château is very fine."

"You speak quite coolly; what is there amiss in that poor château?"

"Nothing, sir."

"And what have you to say to the garden, or to the grounds?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Nothing! Oh! my child, do not say that. Like Sainville,—I want you to like it."

He spoke with so much warmth, that he stopped short.

He took her hand, and looked down at her eagerly. She turned very pale, and trembled visibly. He smiled.

"Do not look so frightened," said he, gently; "but come in here: I want to speak to you."

A spell seemed on Nathalie: she yielded like a child, as he made her enter the recess of the sleeping nymph, which they were just then passing by. On seeing where they were, he stopped short, released her, and cast a gloomy look around him.

"Oh! Petite, Petite!" he bitterly said, "what brought us here?"

"Is not this a pretty place?" asked Nathalie endeavoring to look composed.

At first he did not reply.

"You like it!" he said at length; "do not; the shadow of death is on it—a shadow nothing can remove. Look at that nymph! Hers is no earthly sleep—it is the sleep of the funereal genius I once saw on an ancient tombstone in Italy, and whose brow, though wreathed with flowers, looked oppressed with something more heavy than mere slumber. You like the sun. When does it penetrate through those yews and cypresses—fit trees for what is little better than a tomb?"

He spoke with impatient bitterness. There was a long pause, broken by no sound save the low splash of the fountain. Nathalie looked at Monsieur de Sainville, at the nymph in her ivied niche; she listened to the low murmurs of the falling waters, and seemed to be eagerly seeking, from all she saw and heard, the key of some half-divined mystery.

"Yes, I like this place," she observed, at length.

"It does not sadden or oppress you?"

"No; why should it?"

"True; why should it? And yet the eternal splash of that fountain is strangely monotonous, and the breath it sends upon the air is very chill. See, your hair is covered with spray."

"I find it cooling to the brow, and pleasant to the ear."

"But it will end by depressing you at length."

"I am not easily depressed."

"No, poor child! I dare say you have made the best of the little happiness that came in your way."

He was looking at her kindly, yet sadly.

"It is so difficult to be miserable for a long time," she said.

"Yet you had your troubles?"

"Hope upheld me with a nameless trust in some unknown good still to come."

"It was not hope: it was the freshness of your years; the inexperience of youth, which knows not life for what it is: a weary burden—a dark captivity."

"I do not believe that, at all!" cried Nathalie; "it is too hard to believe," she added, coloring at the vivacity with which she had spoken.

"Ay, hard, indeed—but too true."

"But surely, sir," said Nathalie very earnestly, "there is such a thing as happiness?"

He did not reply.

"However brief it may be," she continued, hesitatingly.

"And what happiness can be called genuine, that does not endure? From the moment we know it must end with life, is not the longest happiness miserably brief? Oh! that thought that all must die and every thing perish! Like the skeleton guest of Egypt's ancient banquets, it haunts every mortal festivity."

He spoke sorrowfully. Nathalie eyed him wistfully.

"Why should one look at that skeleton, or think of death?" she asked in a low soft tone. "It is of itself so hard to believe in, so easy to forget. Oh! when the sun shines so brightly, when the air is so pure, the sky so blue, the whole earth so fair, may not one sometimes imagine, looking at that beautiful universe, of which, however insignificant, we yet form a part,—why should it not endure thus for ever?"

She looked at him; he drew her arm within his.

"My poor little thing," said he, "death will overtake you as it overtakes us all; with years that pass like days, and treacherous stealthy steps that fall on the ear unheeded and unheard. Fresh and fair as you are now, you too must share the fate of earth's most glorious and most lovely things; you too must pass away, and fade, and die."

The low and mournful cadence of his voice thrilled through the heart of Nathalie. She looked up into his face with a fixed glance and parted lips, in a sort of a serious and rapt attention. Far from saddening her, his words had only brought a deeper hue to her cheeks and a softer light to her eyes; there seemed to be for her joy, and no gloom in the mournful images he had called up. She smiled to herself, like one who beholds some fair inward vision.

"No matter," said she, pressing her hands to her bosom, whilst the smile still lingered on her lips; "no matter; there is happiness still!"

"I hope so," he replied in his usual tone. "But you are shivering; it must be this chill place."

He led her away; they ascended the flight of steps in silence; he paused before a sunny bench on the first terrace.

"Let us sit here," he said, "and continue our argument. Why do you not like Sainville?"

"I never said I did not like it, sir," replied Nathalie, startled at this abrupt remark.

"But you spoke very coldly. Look at it! Does not the old château look warm and bright in the sunshine, with the blue sky beyond? If you were to live here long, would you always be regretting Provence? Believe me, forget Arles; and like Sainville."

"I like Sainville, sir." She spoke so low that the words were well nigh inaudible. They both sat on the bench; he stooped to hear her better, when a discreet cough in the neighboring alley announced the approach of Amanda.

A mutual impulse made them rise. Nathalie became crimson. Monsieur de Sainville looked pale and angry. The lady's maid came up with a thick shawl on her arm. "Madame, fearing lest mademoiselle should take cold on this chill morning, had told her to bring her this."

"Rosalie is thoughtful," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville; "and now that you have that shawl, will you not take another turn around the garden?"

He took her arm as he spoke; but Nathalie disengaged it quickly. She colored, hesitated, stammered, and at length replied that she felt tired and would rather go in. He did not seem quite pleased, but raised no objection. He went in through the library. She entered the château by the front entrance, and immediately proceeded to the drawing-room.

"Have you had an agreeable walk?" asked Madame Marceau. She had half-raised herself on one elbow to look at Nathalie. The shawl had fallen back, and no longer concealed her figure, once so full and stately, now shrunk and wasted by disease. The curtains of the drawing-room shut out the clear light as usual, but their crimson hue fell in vain on her pale features, rendered more pale by the feverish glitter of her sunken eyes

"Yes, madame, a very agreeable walk," replied Nathalie.

"But solitary. What a pity!"

"I met Monsieur de Sainville," said Nathalie in a low tone.

"Indeed! I thought him at Marmont. Where did you meet him?"

"In the green-house."

"His favorite resort: yours, too, I suppose?"

"By no means," drily replied the young girl.

"Well, Petite, do not put on that serious face. Just lay by your work, and let me look at you. Ay, so. I have a question to ask; what did Armand say to you?"

She again raised herself on one elbow. Nathalie colored deeply, and looked disturbed; but she did not reply.

"I thought so!" indignantly exclaimed the lady, sinking back on the couch. "Well," she sharply added, "you do not answer!"

"I might refuse to answer," said Nathalie, rather haughtily; "but it is not worth while. Monsieur de Sainville spoke to me only on the most general subjects."

"And on none in particular?"

"Oh! yes," negligently replied Nathalie; "on the north, the south, and so on."

"What do you mean by so on?" asked Madame Marceau, with a short laugh.

Nathalie looked up, so flushed and irritated, that the lady softened down immediately.

"Petite," she said, "you are vexed. I will make no apologies; but put your hand here,"—she took her hand and laid it on her heart, as she spoke,—"and here," she added, making her feel her hot and throbbing wrist; "then ask yourself if the fever, which wastes life at that rate, leaves the mind calm, and the temper smooth?"

"You have a strong fever; let me send for the doctor," exclaimed Nathalie, appeased at once.

"I am not ill; mine is a fever of mind no doctor's art can appease. I was very absurd awhile ago; but when I learned you had met Armand, I concluded he had been repeating to you what passed between him and me, just before he went to the garden."

"I am not in Monsieur de Sainville's confidence," gravely replied Nathalie.

"But if what passed between us was about you?"

"About me!" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Come, I see he has been discreet. So much the better. Men mar where they meddle. Do not look so disturbed; I cannot explain myself for a few days yet. This much I can tell you: Armand makes me miserable. We never quarrel; but we are always jarring. But why should I complain? He is to me what he has been to every one—to himself first of all—inexorable. I am ambitious; it is in our race. Yes," she added, with her old pride rising, "ambition and will are in the blood of the Sainvilles. Have I not that for which I may well be aspiring? You have seen my son; he is young, handsome, and full of talent. Think you he would not make a fit representative of the old family honors? Come, be frank," she added, with a penetrating glance; "do you not think he would?"

Nathalie looked embarrassed, in spite of herself.

"Child," returned Madame Marceau, smiling, "why do you blush? What mother can resent that which she herself feels so deeply? We will have no explanations," she added, perceiving that Nathalie looked disturbed: "I proceed. Do you not think my son would bear the old name with all due honor? You do; but his uncle, but my brother," she added, with much bitterness, "does not."

Nathalie had too long suspected this, to look surprised.

"You do not seem astonished," suspiciously said the lady; "then he has told you after all! Come, confess it."

"Madame," replied Nathalie, in an accent that carried conviction with it, "he has never even hinted this to me."

"Forgive me, Petite; I am strangely sensitive on this point. But to return. Do you think my ambition, hope, dream,—call it what you will,—so extravagant? Could not that which has been done for the most noble families of France, be done for ours? We should have no Rohans, no Richelieus, if the salic system had been carried out. Did not the niece of the great Cardinal marry her music-master? and the last daughter of the Rohans fall in love with Chabot, the cadet of Gascony, and by marrying him, perpetuate a name otherwise doomed to extinction? But reason, example, and argument have proved unavailing; he has refused—absolutely refused. And on what plea?—why, on the plea that the name he has, by so much sacrifice and labor, saved from disgrace, shall not be periled again!"

She ceased. A crimson spot burned on her pale cheek; she looked feverish and excited. Nathalie, who had heard her with deep attention, now said, quietly:

"But how can Monsieur de Sainville prevent his name from being periled again? If he should marry, for instance?'

Madame Marceau turned slowly round on her couch, looked at the young girl's attentive face, smiled, turned back again, and muttered to herself, "Marry! Armand marry! Petite,' she resumed, in her usual tone, "you surprise me! I thought every one knew my brother would not marry. You may imagine that if I did not know this, as I know it, I should never have hinted to him the propriety of my son assuming a name which would have been the exclusive right of his own children. And so," she added, turning round again, and giving the young girl a fixed and piercing gaze, "so you really did not know, or even suspect, that Armand would never marry?"

Nathalie did not answer.

"How strange!" continued the lady, laughing, and seeming much amused; "excuse me, Petite; but the idea of Armand marrying, is to me so peculiar. Very." She laughed again. "And so," she resumed, when this mirthful fit was over, "so you never noticed his constrained politeness to us poor women! So you never noticed how he sneers at our little follies; how impatient he is of our weakness: how little he cares to disguise his real opinion of us—namely, that we are weak, frivolous, inconstant, incapable of real or high feeling—toys to be trifled with in a light or idle hour: no more? And so you never noticed how he mocks at love and marriage, and so forth; and yet you have been here a whole winter, Petite?'

Nathalie remained silent.

"You see," said Madame Marceau, "it was my knowledge of this solemn vow—and when was Armand ever known to break his word—that made me hope. But when I mentioned this to him this morning, he destroyed that hope at once, by merely saying, "No, I must be the last of the name." But I must and will be just: Armand spoke very kindly of Charles, more kindly than I could have expected. 'Of course,' he said, 'he shall be my heir; let this comfort you, Rosalie. I hope he has too much good sense to care about the name of De Sainville; at all events, I know a way to render the disappointment less bitter. I have been a cold, stern uncle till now, but I may befriend him in a manner he little expects.' But how pale and languid you look, Petite! I fear you are not well; you are too much shut up—you want long walks, like this morning. I hope you will continue to like Sainville: we want you to like it. Let me tell you that you are a great favorite. Ah! if you knew the plans we have been making to prolong your sojourn here?"

Nathalie rose abruptly; she turned pale and flushed by turns; she fastened a searching and burning look on the sick lady.

"Madame," she exclaimed, "do you mean to say that Monsieur de Sainville meant——"

"Do you expect me to tell you that?" gayly interrupted the lady, with a playful wave of the hand; "no, Petite, woman as I am, I can keep a secret."

Nathalie sat down, but she soon rose again; she looked disturbed and anxious. Madame Marceau laughed, and asked if she did not think herself the victim of some deeply-laid scheme? In vain the young girl sought to ascertain any thing positive; she only received hints as vague and delusive as the gleams of light that dance on the changing wave. She felt dazzled, but never enlightened.

This lasted the whole day, for Madame Marceau would not allow her to leave her. Towards evening she fell into her usual slumber. Nathalie sat near her, alone. The lamp was not lit; but the curtains had been drawn back from the central window, whose wide arch framed a quiet picture of the summits of dark trees, that seen thus, looked like the outskirts of some forest solitude. Above, in the blue silent sky, hung the moon, the motive lamp of nature's wide temple suspended there throughout eternity. The room was still; a soft pale light fell on the floor: the evening was mild—the fire burned low, with a faint smouldering light. Nathalie felt oppressed and weary; she turned towards the quiet scene which the window revealed—it looked a calm, peaceful region there, delusive she knew, for it was only the dusty road that spread beyond, and yet even that delusion soothed her. The words of David, "Oh! that I had the wings of a dove, that I might flee away, and be at rest," came back to her heart. For while a dream bore her away on its swift pinions; the freshness of dark places seemed to fall on her wearied spirit; the cool drink of some icy fountain wave, to soothe her inward fever. She rose softly, and glanced towards Madame Marceau. The invalid did not move; her breathing remained regular and low: she complained of restless nights, but her evening sleep was always heavy and deep. Nathalie had all day been longing to go up to Aunt Radegonde; she now thought she could escape unheard, and return before she had been missed. She glided softly towards the door, opened it, closed it noiselessly, and found herself face to face with Monsieur de Sainville, on the landing. She wanted to pass him; he detained her.

"Why did you not come down to dinner?" he asked.

"Madame Marceau made me dine with her."

'What is the matter? Your voice does not sound as usual; has there been any thing to trouble or annoy you?"

His tone was brief, his look keen and penetrating; she averted her face without replying.

"Let me know what it is, I beseech you."

His voice was unusually kind and soothing. Tears trembled on the lashes of her downcast eyes.

"Let me know it, I beseech you," he said again, owering his voice so that no passing servant might overhear his tones.

Before Nathalie could reply, the drawing-room door opened, and Madame Marceau appeared, with her pale face and glittering eyes on the threshold. The subdued light of the lamp, held by the marble slave, shone on their three faces.

"Petite," said she, in a brief abrupt tone, taking Nathalie's arm as she spoke, "why did you leave me? you know I have a horror of remaining alone ever since I am ill."

"And you are ill, very ill to night," observed her brother, with something between anger and pity on his countenance, as he watched her agitated face and trembling frame,—"come in, Rosalie."

He made her release her hold of Nathalie, took her arm and led her into the drawing-room, closing the door behind him. Nathalie went up to the *boudoir* of the Canoness.

"Oh, Petite! how glad I am you are come," eagerly said Aunt Radegonde; "I have been so dull, but now I shall be all right again; for you know what I said this morning: you are better than sunshine, flowers, or bird in the house."

The young girl smiled faintly, but silently sat down on a low stool at the feet of her old friend. Five minutes elapsed; she did not open her lips. The Canoness stooped, made her raise her face so that it met her own attentive gaze, and exclaimed,—

"How pale you are!"

"I have a bad head-ache."

There was another silence.

"Marraine," suddenly observed Nathalie, "is it true that Monsieur de Sainville has taken a vow never to marry?"

Her look was riveted on the features of Aunt Radegonde. She dropped her knitting and turned very pale; her features worked, her lips trembled, and her eyes dimmed with tears.

"Yes," she replied in a broken tone, "he has taken a vow never to marry."

Nathalie rose much disturbed: her features were scarcely less agitated than those of Aunt Radegonde. She walked up and down the room with hasty and uneven steps: at length she paused near the chair of the Canoness, and gently laying her hand on the arm of her old friend, she said, in a remorseful tone,—

"I have been cruel,—forgive me."

"My dear child, you could not know all that such a question called up."

"Yes, yes, I know it," exclaimed the young girl, in a broken tone; "I know it but too well."

The Canoness wheeled back her chair to see her better.

"Petite," she said, "you mistake; you know nothing."

"Nothing!" bitterly replied Nathalie, and she clasped her hands, and again walked up and down the room.

"Petite, what do you know?"

Nathalie shook her head without replying. A hectic flush overspread the features of Aunt Radegonde.

"You must tell me, you must," she exclaimed with unusual warmth.

"And where shall I find the words that will not grieve you?" asked Nathalie with deep sadness. "How shall I say that I know the sad story of one whose image is in this room, who was lovely, and destined to happiness, and who suffered so much through another, who is also dear to you."

"He is not, he is not!" passionately cried the Canoness; "I have never forgiven him in my heart; I never will forgive him. I hate myself sometimes for residing under his roof and eating his bread; yes, I hate myself, I do."

Nathalie eyed her with a troubled look. There is something strange and impressive in the impotent wrath of age,—that last lingering spark of a dying fire. On seeing the gentle Canoness so strangely moved, the young girl began to understand the strength and depth of the resentful feeling which had slumbered all along.

"Do you know," continued the Canoness, in the same excited tone, "that she was dear to me as mine own child; that she was a poor motherless orphan; the daughter of a loved and only sister; that I brought her up here in this house, and that for sixteen years she never left me. That she was beautiful as the day, and the gentlest creature that ever lived; that to see her was to love her, and that but for one hard heart she might be with us still,—a joy to all, a blessing to me. You weep; you feel for her. God bless your kind heart;—say, was not hers a hard fate? He came back in time; her father relented, but *he* would not; his pride—that pride which will bring down a judgment on him yet—would not let him relent or forgive.. He allowed her to be married to another almost before his eyes. She died of a broken heart; he lived on calm, prosperous, and happy."

"The color had repeatedly changed on Nathalie's cheek as she listened to Aunt Radegonde. Her hands were nervously clasped together; her look was feverish; in a voice she vainly strove to render calm, she said, "How do you know he is happy? how do you know he does not suffer?"

The Canoness gave her a dreary look.

"To suffer, he should have a heart, and it is not a heart he has, but a stone. I always warned my poor child not to like him; but youth is rash, and she would not be warned. She might have found many another suitor, for she was very lovely. That portrait is her very image. Look at her! My Aunt Adelaide was beautiful, no doubt, but never half so beautiful as my own Lucille. She never had that fine silken hair my hand has smoothed and caressed so often; she never had those soft blue eyes that have looked up into mine with a smile,—many, oh! many a time."

She ceased; her tears were falling fast. Nathalie looked at the two portraits: at the dark and at the fair beauty; at the face that had the coloring, rich, warm, and yet soft, of some old Venetian master; at the other calm countenance, with the lovely, but pale outlines of a Raffaelle head. She compared them: Adelaide de Sainville looked very beautiful, but when she turned from her to the serene face, it seemed as if that bewitching, but still earthly beauty faded away as mortal and perishable, before the pure and ideal loveliness of Aunt Radegonde's lost niece.

"Oh, Marraine!" she exclaimed, in a low tone, "if he does not suffer, remember, and regret, why that vow?"

"Pride, child,—pride. Once deceived by woman, he will not be deceived a second time."

"Hush," quickly said Nathalie.

Her ear had detected the well-known step; the door opened, Monsieur de Sainville entered. The Canoness looked disconcerted; Nathalie agitated. He eyed them keenly from the threshold of the room; closed the door deliberately; came forward and excused himself in his customary calm tone, for not having warned his aunt of his visit.

"It is no matter, Armand—no matter," she replied; but her voice quivered, and her hands trembled as she resumed her knitting.

Her nephew glanced from her to Nathalie. The young girl had risen; she avoided his look, took up a book lying on the table, turned over a few pages, closed it, and left the room without speaking.

"Aunt," abruptly asked Monsieur de Sainville, "what is the matter with Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

"She has a bad head-ache."

"Nothing else?"

His look was piercing; but the Canoness calmly replied:

"No, Armand, nothing else that I know of."

"There is something going on to-day in this house, which I cannot understand," he said impatiently. "What is it? You look surprised. Well, I dare say you know nothing about it. Listen to this, however: Petite is unwell; she wants a walk, make her—you can if you wish—take one to-morrow."

"Certainly, Armand," answered the Canoness, with much alacrity, for she felt this concern in one whom she loved, soothing and complimentary. As a sort of *amende honorable* for the harsh feelings she had been cherishing against him, she added, "and I am very much obliged to you, Armand, for the interest you take in Petite."

A peculiar smile played around the pale firm lips of Monsieur de Sainville as he received these thanks, and looked down at the little but erect figure of his aunt.

"Petite!" he echoed, "what tempted you to call her so; she is not short?"

"No, certainly; but there is something slight and airy about her. She is not one of those women, for instance, who fill a room; a sort of woman I never could endure," emphatically added the Canoness.

"Petite," as you call her, "is certainly not one of those ample ladies; but she can fill a room with noise. Was it not her I heard singing here this morning, or Amanda, perhaps?"

"Amanda!" indignantly exclaimed his aunt; "do you imagine, Armand, I would allow my niece's *femme de chambre* to sing in my room, in my presence?"

"I thought you liked that girl," replied her nephew, eyeing her fixedly; "she is a good deal with you."

"But I keep her at a distance,—at a great distance," emphatically said his aunt.

"Then it was Mademoiselle Montolieu who sang?"

"Yes, she was as merry as a bird this morning; but this evening she scarcely opened her lips."

"She is not well; I saw it at once," returned Monsieur de Sainville, with a brief expression of anxiety. "I hope you will tell her to take a walk to-morrow morning."

"Be quite easy, Armand," said the Canoness, with a shrewd nod; "I shall tell her to walk up and down by the river side; there is a fine breeze there."

"A great deal too fine," quickly replied her nephew; "besides there are workmen engaged there now; it would annoy her."

"Then I shall make her promise to keep to the first terrace, where the sun is so warm."

"Let her choose her own walk, aunt," he said, somewhat impatiently, "she will enjoy it more."

There was a pause; Monsieur de Sainville bade his aunt good night, walked to the door, and suddenly came back; he drew La Rochefoucauld from his pocket, and put it on the table.

"I found Mademoiselle Montolieu reading this book this morning," he said briefly; "I took it from her; it seemed a pity that the freshness of so young a mind should be tarnished by such bitter lore. Why did you not lend her some tale, or novel, aunt?"

"A tale, a novel! Armand; and to a young girl?"

"Why not?" he composedly asked; "I suppose that no tale or novel in your possession would be unfit for her reading! And I believe it is for youth those books are most proper."

"That is not my creed," firmly said the Canoness.

"Aunt, novels are very harshly treated; they are simply a want of our imaginative faculties, which must and will be satisfied. Youth must have romances, or, what is far more dangerous, it will make to itself romances of its own. But that is not the question; I return this book to you because it is from you it was had; it was mine formerly, but I do not value it now. *Apropos*," he carelessly added, "you may induce Mademoiselle Montolieu to prolong her walk, by telling her that a fine azelia has arrived this afternoon, and is now in the green-house."

"An azelia!" cried the Canoness; well, then, I think I shall venture out with Petite to see the azelia."

"No, pray do not," very quickly said her nephew; "there is still a very keen breeze out."

And when he again stood near the door, he turned round to say, very seriously,—

"Aunt, promise me that you will not go out to-morrow."

The Canoness gave the required promise.

"He is kind, after all," she thought, when her nephew was gone, and willing to gratify him at once, she rang the bell. Amanda made her appearance.

"I wish to see Mademoiselle Montolieu," said the Canoness, in a distant tone, suggested by the recent conversation.

"I am sorry to inform madame, that Mademoiselle Montolieu, being troubled with a bad headache, has retired to her room."

"Then I must see her when she comes down to-morrow morning. Mademoiselle Montolieu is my companion, and I must say I think the way in which my neice usurps her society is quite preposterous. I never can see her. I shall expect to see her to-morrow morning; I have an important communication to make to her. It is quite necessary Mademoiselle Montolieu should take exercise, and there is something in the green-house she is expected to go and look at. I must have a conversation with Mademoiselle Montolieu on that subject."

And with a dignified wave of the hand Amanda was dismissed.

◆

CHAPTER XX.

Artists have the privilege of forgetfulness, and Mademoiselle Amanda was, to use her own expression, "oblivious."

Thus, though she saw Nathalie on the following morning, and spoke for a full half-hour on various subjects connected with her art and the dulness of the château, she wholly forgot to deliver the message of the Canoness; through which piece of obliviousness the blossoms of the azelia bloomed, withered, and fell unseen by Nathalie.

No sooner did the young girl come down to the drawing-room, than Madame Marceau declared she looked pale and unwell. "It was the dulness and seclusion of her existence was the cause of this. She wanted change. Why not go and spend the day, the whole day, with her sister?"

Nathalie declined; but the lady was importunate: she yielded. In another half-hour she was standing in the quiet court at the door of Madame Lavigne's dwelling. The place looked even more silent and lonely than usual in this soft April morning,—gray, humid, free from sunshine, but calm and mild, with the last lingering chillness of winter melting away before the genial breath of spring

Rose was sitting alone. She greeted her sister quietly, but with a long earnest look she had often fastened on her of late. Nathalie shunned her glance. and took up the other end of the sheet Rose was hemming. But her portion of the task soon lay neglected on her lap; she reclined back in her chair, one hand supporting her cheek. her head slightly averted, her look fixed on the old tower opposite; she looked pale and thoughtful.

"What is the matter with you?" suddenly asked Rose.

"It is the weather," slowly replied Nathalie, bending once more over her work. "I feel dreamy. There is in this cloudy sky, in this humid atmosphere, in this fine rain that scarcely moistens the earth on which it softly falls, in the mildness of the air, telling us spring has returned, something which quite unnerves my southern nature. I feel subdued, passive, and like one in a dream, but without the wish to waken; every thing looks vague and scarcely real; thoughts come and lead me on I know not whither, nor how. If I were walking in the garden now, I should go on without caring to stop; but sitting as I am here, looking at that old tower, and watching those cawing rooks, I feel as if I could remain thus all day long."

"You were not thus when you first went to Sainville!" ejaculated Rose.

"Perhaps not. I lived with children at Mademoiselle Dantin's; but it now seems as if I had passed the boundary of real life. I remember that time as something years ago,—far away in the past."

"Your life is too dull," returned Rose, anxiously.

"I do not find it so. I am getting a nun, like you, Rose; and I like the silence, I had well-nigh said, the solitude, of my convent."

"You must leave the château," urged Rose; "the object you had in remaining there is accomplished; you must leave it and seek some more active life."

"Leave, and fight alone this world's hard battles, Rose!" said Nathalie, with a mournful smile; "strange counsel,—and not counsel for me. I am daring, but not courageous. I can be bold when the peril is far away; but place me on the shore of life's stormy sea, show me the frail barque that is to carry me off,—and my heart sinks with fear within me. The time when I longed for independence is gone. What is it but another name for selfishness? I know nothing more miserable. Why should people be for ever anxious to have their own way, when it would be so much more easy to yield to some safer hand, close one's eyes, and thus go down the stream?"

Rose looked up as her sister spoke thus; she seemed inclined to reply, but checked the temptation; they both worked on in a silence which was not broken until the entrance of Madame Lavigne. The blind woman was even more than usually cross; nothing could please her: Nathalie failed in restoring her to good humor, although she several times endeavored to do so in the course of the day. She once rose to arrange her pillow, but scarcely had her hand touched it when Madame Lavigne turned round on her, exclaiming with a sort of snarl:

"Do not; you know I hate fondling."

She looked any thing but an object to fondle; but Nathalie was in a pacific mood, and only gave her a look of gentle pity.

"Well, what are you standing there for?" snappishly asked Madame Lavigne, turning towards her with a frown; "have you got nothing to say?"

"Nothing, I am afraid, that would amuse you."

"Oh! what a gentle creature we are to-day! how softly we speak with that little low voice. 'Nothing, I am afraid, that would amuse you,' she added, mimicking her; "what if we talk about the best friend: will that rouse and vex you?"

"Why should it vex me, madame?"

"Oh! you know."

"Indeed, I do not."

"It will not vex you, if I say he is harsh and bad."

"I shall conclude that you are mistaken: he is kind and good."

"He is a despot."

"Not in the least; he is just and good to all."

"And to you!" said Madame Lavigne, sneering.

"He is very good to me," seriously replied Nathalie.

"Do not tell me that: I know those Sainvilles; they are flint and steel. I knew *him* when he was a youth, and people called him Monsieur Armand; he then looked sour and dark —I dare say he looks so still."

"Did you see him, then?" asked Nathalie.

"I sat at mass, near him and his pretty cousin, every Sunday for two years."

"What was she like—how did she look?"

A sour and disagreeable expression gradually settled on the features of Madame Lavigne. Her head was sunk on her chest; she shook it slowly, and laughed to herself a low syllabic "Ha-ha!"

"Was she very handsome?" reiterated Nathalie, drawing nearer to the blind woman's chair.

Rose laid down her work, and eyed them both.

Madame Lavigne raised her head, and turned it towards the young girl, as if she still could see with her dull sightless orbs.

"She was beautiful!" she said, emphatically, "but not at all like you; she was like an angel, and you are more like a wicked spirit, or a salamander."

"Was she not very pale?"

"Ay, as pale as a fresh-blown rose; but with all that, she was the most delicate creature eye ever saw—a sylph, in short. But young, pretty, and delicate as she was, she died; whilst old, ugly, and blind, Madame Lavigne has lived on."

"Is it now very long ago?" resumed Nathalie.

"Some fifteen years. Oh! she was a lovely creature!"

Strange power of a matchless beauty! death had stepped in: years had elapsed, but time had not yet effaced the memory of that ideal loveliness which thus seemed to live and to endure beyond the grave. Nathalie asked no further questions: indeed, she spoke no more.

"Go," impatiently exclaimed the blind woman, waving the young girl away; "you have become dull and moping this time back: there is not a bit of spirit left in you. I suppose you are turning lackadaisical and sentimental."

Rose looked at her sister, but Nathalie's face was averted from her, and she could not trace its expression.

Towards twilight the young girl left. Rose accompanied her to the door. They were alone in the dark passage; the elder sister looked at the other with a fixed and earnest glance.

"My poor child!" said she, in a low tone, "you are not well, that I can see. Come to me oftener."

Nathalie did not reply; she twined her arms around the neck of Rose, kissed her, and was gone; but Rose felt that tears, not her own, had remained on her cheek.

In the well-lit hall of the château Nathalie met Amanda. The *femme-de-chambre* stepped forward, and said, with a subdued smile, and downcast look:

"Shall I have the pleasure of accompanying mademoiselle to her room?"

"And for what reason?" inquired Nathalie, much surprised.

"I thought that mademoiselle might like me to assist her in her toilet."

Nathalie thought that Mademoiselle Amanda was very impertinent; but she merely replied that she did not intend changing her dress, and accordingly went up alone to her room. She lingered there long; to go down to the drawing-room, and meet Madame Marceau and her brother was disagreeable to her; she could not even endure the idea of visiting Aunt Radegonde, in her lonely *boudoir;* she wished to be alone—alone with her thoughts. A heaviness of spirit, a sense of coming evil, was over her; she reasoned, and endeavored to chase it away, but it was importunate, and would return: there was no remedy for it, but to submit—to yield to the feeling, and let it have sway. She did so, and the passing weakness relieved her. At nine she resolved on going down; she would greatly have preferred remaining in her room, but it would have looked singular. She paused near the drawing-room door; a regular and monotonous step paced the floor—it was Monsieur de Sainville; she thought he would have retired by this: but whether he was there or not, she must go in. She entered, closed the door behind her, advanced a few steps, then remained rooted to the spot on which she stood. Seated near his mother she had beheld the dark and handsome Charles Marceau.

That strange, heart-sickening dread, which is experienced in the great crisis of existence, came over Nathalie. She felt like one who has long toiled up an arduous way, through some rocky steep, who stands on the crowning summit with at least a glimpse of the promised land in view; but whom an iron grasp suddenly snatches away, and pitilessly drags down again to the dark valleys, where the fair vision is shut out for ever by gloomy and rugged rock. "Oh!" she thought, with a passing feeling of despair, "the moment dreaded so long is come at last." But she remained calm outwardly, for she saw that all were looking at her, from Madame Marceau, on her couch, to Monsieur de Sainville, now standing motionless, like her, in the centre of the room. Charles rose, and bowed; Nathalie inclined her head and came forward; Monsieur de Sainville resumed his promenade; his sister coldly greeted the young girl. No one spoke.

She sat down, and took her work-basket. She looked at Madame Marceau; the lady averted her cold and severe face: at Monsieur de Sainville; he walked up and down the room, and looked neither right nor left: at Charles Marceau; he alone seemed perfectly composed, and he alone looked at her. She worked for about a quarter of an hour; but she felt like one in a dream, for still she heard the monotonous pace on one side, and on the other met the fixed and watchful look, whenever she raised her glance. She abruptly laid down her task, and retired to her room.

She had foreseen it would come to this. Why should she remain for ever in that house? And yet it now seemed very hard and bitter to go. "And must I go, indeed?" she asked herself, with her brow leaning on her hand; and conscience and pride gave but one reply: "Depart! You have no right to stay here, to be the cause of useless strife;—depart!" She struggled, and finally yielded. She would leave on the following morning, early, without seeing any one. But would not this look as if she had run away? She would be missed; servants would be questioned; and it would all seem very strange. She at length resolved on writing to Monsieur de Sainville; but when the note—a short one—lay sealed upon her desk, she asked herself how he would receive it. To leave it in her room was useless—to give it to a servant was precisely what she most wished to avoid. In her perplexity, she almost thought of going down to the library and asking Monsieur de Sainville to grant her an interview; but the idea was quickly rejected for another which it had suggested.

Nathalie had not resided so long in the château without knowing the daily habits of its master. He was an early riser, and went down to the library every morning. The young girl intended being gone by that time; a letter placed there for him, lying on the table, in some conspicuous spot, would therefore meet his view at once, and long before her departure could have been discovered by any one else. She knew her host too well not to feel certain that he would immediately take such steps as would check indiscreet or disagreeable conjectures. This was, therefore, the course she resolved on adopting. She extinguished her light, and sat down near the window, waiting until a light should appear in the opposite turret. She waited long; but it came at length, and with it appeared Monsieur de Sainville's figure, seen through the muslin curtain. Nathalie did not wait for more. She took a letter, opened the door, paused, and listened. The house was perfectly still. She walked softly along the corridor—since her illness, Madame Marceau had removed to a lower apartment—and, when she had reached the head of the staircase, looked down over the banister. A faint circle of light glimmered at the bottom of its dark depths; she knew this must be the lamp in the hall, dying away; it was as she thought. The last servant had retired to rest,—no one would see or disturb her. Her step was light; her satin slippers made no sound, and fell noiselessly on each step of polished oak. She had gone down as far the first floor landing, when she suddenly stopped short. Madame Marceau's door, which faced the drawing-room, stood ajar, and a faint streak of light glided out on the otherwise dark landing. Whilst Nathelie hesitated, and wondered whether she ought to proceed or to retrace her steps, she heard Madame Marceau's voice exclaiming:

"Charles, do not blame me! What I saw made me desperate. Do not blame me! I meant well; and all for your good. Do not break my heart—do not!"

Her son made some low reply, which did not reach Nathalie's ear.

"And I tell you," passionately answered his mother, "that though I should die, this shall not be! She—she—it shall not be—it shall not be!"

Her voice rose louder with every word. Nathalie heard the young man leave his seat, and close the door. The landing relapsed into sudden darkness and silence. The young girl paused for a moment, then softly glided down. She reached the hall, which was still partly lit by the faint, lurid light of the dying lamp, without having awakened one echo in the now silent house. To add to her good fortune, she found the library door ajar; she entered, and closed it softly after her.

Notwithstanding his predilection for cold climates, Monsieur de Sainville did not seem averse to a good fire, for the remains of what had evidently been a bright one, still burned on the hearth. But it only shed a warm, soft light, that did not dispel the shadowy gloom of the apartment; there was no clear, vivid flame, to give distinctness to every object; Nathalie could merely see her way. She reached the table, placed her letter on a book, and rejoicing at her success, was turning towards the door, when she perceived Monsieur de Sainville standing near her. He had come by the private staircase, and entered unheard. She remained petrified. Even by that doubtful light she could detect the surprised expression of his countenance. This was a circumstance so perfectly unexpected by her, that Nathalie lost all her presence of mind, and stood motionless and mute. He quietly stooped on the hearth, applied a match to the embers, and in a second had lit one of the waxlights in the sconces on either side of the mirror over the mantel-piece.

"You came to look at my books!" he said with a smile. "Well, you will find, as I said, poems, and even novels, amongst them."

He spoke in a light, jesting tone, as if it were perfectly natural for him to find her at this hour in an apartment which was his so exclusively; but though he probably did so in order to dispel her embarrassment, Nathalie could see his keen, rapid look wandering restlessly from her to the table. She could also see, in the mirror before her, that she was very pale, and she felt herself trembling.

"Sir," she began in a faltering tone, "I feel how surprised——"

"No, I was not much surprised," he interrupted; "my first impression was that nothing but a ghost or spirit could move so softly; it not being, however, the witching time of midnight, I concluded that Mademoiselle Amanda, who has rather a literary turn, had come here for an hour's reading; but she does not wear that simple brown dress, by which I perceived it must be you."

Mademoiselle Amanda was, indeed, twice as smart as Nathalie, who had persisted in retaining the simple, quaker-like costume she wore at Mademoiselle Dantin's; her motive, it must be confessed, being far more akin to pride than to the lowly virtue of humility. Far from displeasing, the allusion of her host rather gratified her, or rather would have gratified her, if she could have thought of any thing save her present awkward predicament.

"Sir," she resumed, a little more composedly, "I know you must wonder——"

"Wonder—no! I wonder at nothing."

"Allow me, sir; it must look strange,—but I did not come here at this hour without having a motive for doing so. There was a letter——" She looked at the table, covered with papers, and could not see her epistle.

"You put it on that Encyclopedia," said he, quietly. He stepped forward, took up the letter, glanced at the name written on the back, broke the seal, and read it deliberately.

"So," said he, looking up with a steady glance, at Nathalie, "you warn me that you are going; thank me for my hospitality, many kindnesses, and so forth. Pray, may I ask you why you have resolved on this precipitate departure?'

"Because your nephew has returned, sir," gravely replied Nathalie.

"Be easy, then; unless I am much mistaken, he will leave to-morrow. He came without my permission, and shall depart through my order."

He looked stern and forbidding.

"You remain, of course?" he added, after awhile.

"No, sir," she seriously answered, "I have taken the resolve to leave Sainville." She spoke with some emphasis.

"Taken the resolve to leave Sainville!" he echoed, with a smile, as if he scarcely held this to be serious. "My child, never 'take a resolve;' next to a vow it is the most foolish thing I know." He spoke slowly, uttering word by word.

Nathalie looked at him with startling suddenness.

"Foolish! you think a vow foolish!" she exclaimed. Eager inquiry was in her fixed look and parted lips.

"Foolish and absurd," he deliberately answered; "but what interest do you feel in this? Have you been taking a vow, that you look so startled? Believe me: break your vow, on the principle that, as to take it was foolish, to keep it would be sinful."

"You do not think a vow binding?" asked Nathalie in a low tone.

"Not unless when it happens to be a promise. Was yours a promise?"

"No; at least I do not think so." She spoke hesitatingly but her face was radiant with joy.

"Come," he said, with a smile, and looking at her attentively; "I see I have been a good casuist, and removed your scruples; and now tell me what cloud has been on you these two days, that you have remained either invisible or mute?"

She colored deeply, but did not reply.

"I had a bad headache," she answered at length.

He smiled rather skeptically, but merely said:

"Is it gone?"

His look and tone made her at once recover her composure, and she very coolly replied:

"Oh! dear, no!"

He did not insist, but negligently taking up her letter, observed:

"Of course this is *non-avenu;* you remain? What! you ook doubtful? Did I not tell you Charles was going away to-morrow?

He spoke with stern brevity. Few persons would have ared to interfere in a matter on which Monsieur de Sainville had once pronounced; yet it was this Nathalie now ventured to do.

"Madame Marceau is very ill, sir," she urged appealingly.

"She is, and therefore I did not order Charles to leave the house immediately."

"Order!" she had not thought he could be so severe and imperious as this one word proved him. He looked at her attentively, then said with some abruptness:

"You understand the nature of a contract, do you not?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Well, then, a contract has been passed between Charles and me. For the sake of certain advantages I need not detail, he has, of his own free will, agreed to obey me on all points save one; it was I who stipulated that on that point he should be his own master. Had he preferred total independence, he might have had it; nor would I have allowed my sister's son to struggle unaided through the world, but he chose to place his neck under the yoke in order to ascend more rapidly. I warned him that I would have entire submission or none; he consented; yet, has already violated the contract twice. It is now broken for ever."

All this was very clear and logical, and because it was so logical, Nathalie, who ever acted from impulse, thought it hard.

"Confess that you think me despotic?" said Monsieur de Sainville.

"No, sir," replied Nathalie, a little confused, "it is only justice."

"But a sort of justice you do not like?"

"Madame Marceau is very ill, sir."

"Do you imagine she wishes for his presence here? Do you imagine he consulted her feelings when he returned?"

"She may be angry with him, sir; but she cannot but be deeply grieved at your anger."

"He has broken the contract; it cannot be helped."

"Madame Marceau is very ill, sir."

"I am afraid she is."

"The shock may injure her."

He said nothing.

"Yes, indeed, it may injure her very much," she persisted.

"Do you mean to say that I ought to forgive Charles this second disobedience?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Then ask me."

He spoke in a low tone; his arms folded on his breast; his look was downcast, and did not once seek hers.

Nathalie thought her ear must have deceived her, and eyed him with a perplexed glance.

"You will not?" said he, turning towards her; "you are too proud to prefer a request?"

"No, sir, but——" she paused.

"I see, I must explain myself," he resumed; "have you never read that legend of the perturbed spirit that must be questioned before it can speak? Suppose that we take another version of the legend: that it is a spirit that must be asked a boon by some pure mortal before it can grant it?"

"But, sir," said Nathalie seriously, "there are no spirits in this case."

"How do you know? What do you know about spirits and their ways? Why should not men be possessed now by them, as in the time when the Gospel was preached?"

"Those were evil spirits, sir."

"Ay, and they have not yet left this earth; they daily go forth amongst us and tenant many a human frame. Child, are not our evil passions spirits that need some pure influence to cast them forth? Is not will, tyranny; is not pride the sin of Satan?"

Still Nathalie hesitated. She did not understand why Monsieur de Sainville wished to be asked that which he now seemed willing to yield.

"Then, I suppose, sir," she hesitatingly observed, "you would grant a request?"

"Why do you wish to know, and yet have not courage to brave the spirits whose existence you denied?"

"Monsieur de Sainville," said Nathalie, somewhat piqued, "I ask you to forgive your nephew."

"See what a little daring can do," he replied with a smile; "the evil spirit retires subdued; the boon is granted. What would my proud sister say if she knew that the young girl, whom her son must not hope to marry with her consent, has saved that son from a grievous fall? And yet this is rather awkward," he added after a pause; "for though she knows nothing yet, I have already told Charles it was all over between us. I must retract, I suppose. Well, we will not talk of this just now. I have a question to ask you."

"Sir," said Nathalie, uneasily glancing at the clock, "it .s late; had I not better go?"

"Why so? I shall not detain you long; and you surely do not think there is any harm in talking here with me a few moments?"

He spoke very seriously, and she quite as seriously replied: "No, sir."

"I have only a brief question to put: You meant to leave Sainville; what were your intentions for the future?"

He slowly turned round as if to see her better whilst she delivered the expected reply. Nathalie felt somewhat embarrassed. She had looked on that momentous subject with all the delightful vagueness of years; the future to her was some undefined good in store; a broad realm of which she was sovereign lady; which she had but to enter, win and possess.

"I had no intentions for the future," she at length replied, "but the world was before me; I am young; I could work, strive, and if needs be, endure." She spoke earnestly, and therefore was no little piqued to perceive her host looking down at her with a skeptical yet not unkind smile:

"Oh! wise daring of youth!" he returned; "you are eighteen; that is to say, just more than a child; and you talk of trying your fortunes, without doubt, without fear?"

"I have no fortunes to try; I simply meant to live."

"And living in our pleasant, social state is in itself a singular share of good fortune. Have you any idea of the struggles a woman, especially, must go through, in order to earn her daily bread? And you, so proud, so heedless, so confiding, so frank,—you actually contemplated that destiny! And how you would have trusted and been deceived," he added, eyeing her compassionately; "by women especially. You are credulous by nature; do not look so indignant; I give you my word I have a sincere respect for a certain sort of ignorance,—credulous, as I said, and trusting; consequently, easily imposed upon."

"Really, sir," said Nathalie, coloring, and looking almost offended, "all this is not very flattering."

"Is it not? Would you have preferred hearing me address you in this strain?—'Mademoiselle Montolieu, I admire your resolve to enter at once into the great social strife. I feel confident so enterprising and prudent a young lady will emerge triumphantly from every difficulty. Your shrewdness and sagacity render it of course impossible that man should ever deceive or woman outwit you.' Come, would you have preferred this?"

"No, sir; but surely there is such a thing as not being outwitted, nor yet outwitting."

"The medium course; no;—believe me, that is rare—rare! it is impossible."

"Then I wonder how many people you have outwitted in your time?" promptly thought Nathalie.

"You may as well say it aloud," he observed, with a smile. "Well, I have outwitted a good many, no doubt; but do not draw wrong conclusions; I am no disciple of Machiavel. I give you my word," he emphatically added, "that I have never deceived, save where an attempt to deceive me had first been made; then, of course, it was self-defence—as legitimate as it was easy."

Nathalie gave him a curious and astonished look.

"I see," he continued, "that you are longing to know how this easy art is managed; I will tell you, because, even when you know it, it is an art you will never learn; otherwise, I should not open my lips. This great art is, to let the individual who attempts to deceive me believe that he or she has succeeded—no more. You look disappointed—you think, is this all? You had imagined subtle plans and deep counter-scheming. No, believe me, all that is shallow, tedious and useless; deceivers are always prepared for either counter-schemes or entire success: they are, moreover, weak and vain, like other mortals; they believe in the success of their wit, when they do not find it opposed by scheming; the thing they are least prepared for is, that their plans should be detected, and yet not met by other plans. You see, there is nothing very heinous in my system—I deceive passively."

"Since it is so easy, sir, why should I not try?"

"Because you would fail. You cannot deceive, even passively."

"This is not deceiving—it is only not allowing one's self to be seen through."

"Precisely; it is the art of being opaque."

He did not add, "and you are transparent;" but she felt it was implied.

"Then I shall always be imposed upon?"

"Very often, I fear."

"And it is foolish to be deceived easily?"

"Why so? It is not by talent that people deceive, nor by talent that they oppose deceit; this is not a question of mind, but of character. A fool may lay a scheme that shall impose on a genius, yet he is still a fool, and the genius is a genius. If I mention all this," he continued, after a pause, "it is to satisfy, not to serve you—you will be deceived as easily as if I had never spoken."

"Sir," said Nathalie, rather piqued at these repeated assertions, "I do not trust every one as you seem to think."

"Do you not? I had imagined you were in a state of universal faith."

"Oh! dear, no!" quite coolly.

"In whom, then, do you trust? What! no reply? This looks serious. I shall begin by myself; do you trust me?"

He spoke in that light tone beneath which he often conveyed some graver meaning; but the look he bent upon her was singularly keen and penetrating.

Nathalie looked grave, or, as it is so well expressed by the French word, *recueillie*.

"Yes, sir, I do," she slowly answered.

"But in a vague way,—no more?'

He still spoke inquiringly. She looked up.

"Entirely," was her reply

There was a pause.

"I can see you mean it," he said at length; "there is faith in your look,—in your voice. Yet see how imprudent you are! Why on earth should you trust me? How can you actually know that I deserve your confidence?"

"And when one knows," she quickly said, "where is the trust?"

She instantly repented the words, and colored deeply; but though she almost fancied that a faint tinge of color rose to her host's pale cheek, he neither looked round nor seemed to have heard her, as he stood there, leaning against the table, and facing the dark fireplace. But he had heard her, nevertheless, for he said, quietly:

"You have given an excellent definition of 'trust;' far too good, indeed, for one who meant to go forth, and brave the struggles of life. My poor child, dream no more of leaving Sainville. When you talk of that so calmly, I seem to see a child indeed—smiling on a plank, tossed by a raging sea. Believe me, it is good to be here: it is good to be sheltered by the substantial walls and broad roof of my old château; it is good to sit in quiet by the hearth of domestic peace, and thence listen to the din and strife of the storm without; to have no other concern with those wild sounds, save that they lull you to a repose more sweet and deep; to see and hear the waves breaking around you, and to feel that the dark tide will never even reach or wet your feet. Trust me, child; I am an old pilot: the struggles of my existence began when you were yet sleeping peacefully in your cradle. You have scarcely felt the first keen breezes, and you are daring and hopeful still. But I, who have weathered many a storm, and gained at last this safe refuge, I would keep you here, and save you from years of toil, destined, perchance, to end in dismal wreck. Remain, my child, remain!"

They stood not far asunder. He gently laid his hand upon her head, and looked down into her flushed and listening face with serious and affectionate tenderness.

She looked as agitated as he seemed calm. Her heart beat so fast, that she feared he must end by hearing its tumultuous throbbings. Hope, and a joy almost delirious, were with her for a moment; for she said to herself that she had found that safer hand to which she longed to trust her barque that same morning. He was silent now; but she still seemed to hear his low, kind voice saying, "Remain, my child, remain!" She heard no other sounds; but he did. He heard the hurried footsteps overhead, the sudden opening of a door, the violent ringing of a bell; and removing his hand from Nathalie's head, he exclaimed:

"What has happened?"

The sounds came from his sister's room, which was exactly over the library; he knew it, looked disturbed, and went to the door; then suddenly came back, as Nathalie was going to follow him.

"Do not go," said he; "I have granted you a request—grant me this. Remain here until I return. I have more to say. You do not refuse, do you?"

"No, sir." But she spoke hesitatingly.

"You look timid. Are you afraid to remain here alone, my child? I am only going to see what it is; I shall soon be back."

He led her to a chair, made her sit down, and assuring her, with a smile, that he should not be long away, left her.

* * *

CHAPTER XXI.

She remained alone.

Scarcely had the door closed on Monsieur de Sainville, when she heard him briefly inquiring:

"Charles, what is the matter?"

"My mother is ill, sir," answered the young man's voice in the hall.

"What has made her so?"

There was no reply.

"Charles, what has made your mother ill? She seemed no worse than usual when she went up to her room. Have you been talking to her?" he added, after a pause.

"Yes, sir, I have."

"And what have you been saying to her?"

"Only what you were kind enough to tell me," replied the young man with some bitterness.

Monsieur de Sainville did not answer, but Nathalie heard him ordering a servant to ride off for the doctor; then his step ascended the staircase,—ere long she heard it in the room above,—but in a few moments all was still. There was a long silence, unbroken save by a low, monotonous sound,—the sound of speech. Sometimes she thought it rose almost to altercation,—at other times it wholly ceased. At length she heard the step of Monsieur de Sainville again; she thought he was coming down, and, bending forward, listened eagerly:—no; he was merely pacing his sister's room to and fro. She sank back on her seat with an impatient and disappointed sigh, and looking abstractedly around her. The fire was out, the solitary wax-light burned with a pale flickering ray lost in that wide room The bust looked white, spectre-like, and yet living; for a moment the young girl almost imagined that the cynical, though strangely intellectual head of Voltaire smiled down sarcastically at her from its cornice, whilst the serene and ideal face of Fénélon gazed on her with gentle reproach;—the one deriding, the other mildly reproving the folly of her thoughts. A small volume lay open on a table before her,—she took it up; it was the imitation of Jesus Christ, open at the sixth chapter of the first book; she read the chapter through. Of what did it treat? Of the vanity of inordinate affections; of dying to the flesh; of the perishable nature of all human feelings; of the peace which dwells in a passionless heart. She laid it down impatiently. The book of human skepticism and that of religious faith—La Rochefoucauld and Thomas à Kempis—still told the same story.

He had said that he would soon return, but an hour elapsed and yet he came not; at length the door opened,—he entered. He looked grave and moody; a cloud passed over his brow as he saw Nathalie.

" You remained?" he said, as if he had not expected to find her there.

" Yes, sir; you made me promise to stay."

He neither looked at her nor spoke.

" To hear something you had to say," she continued.

He merely said " Ah!" abstractedly, and began walking up and down the room. Nathalie eyed him with mute surprise.

" How is Madame Marceau, sir?" she asked, after a pause of wonder.

He evidently did not hear her; she had to repeat her question. He looked up at her and smiled somewhat bitterly.

" Very ill, indeed," he at length replied; " very ill, indeed. Worse, I believe, than she herself imagines; else——" he broke off, and once more paced the room up and down.

Nathalie rose to leave; he perceived it, walked up to her, took her hand, and looking down at her with some emotion, said:

" You wish to go—I do not detain you—I have nothing to say—You came too late: The evil spirit I asked you to conjure and subdue has turned round, and, before taking flight, cast on me the spell of sudden silence. It might have been well for me had I been less harsh—had I not driven matters to a crisis; but it is too late to repent. I thought myself wise, prudent and clear-sighted, when I was blind and foolish; I thought I could control time, circumstance, and the will of those around me; and I have lived to be baffled. For myself I care not; but I grieve for you. I thought I could make your path smooth and pleasant: that I could spare you trouble and fainting of the heart in your little journey, and now, I find that it is not so; that the course I thought to shape for you must be of your own choosing; that if you wish to reach that shore where happiness awaits you, you must walk to it as Peter walked over the stormy flood—through faith:—But alas! alone, and without the helping hand. God knows I forsake you not willingly; but every man is jealous of his honor, and never yet has there been a stain on mine. Just I will be, no matter at what cost. Good night;—but no; we cannot part thus. Tell me once again that you have faith in me. You hesitate: do you wish to retract?"

"I retract nothing."

"But you look bewildered;—well you may—the test is too severe."

"Severe as it will be, I care not."

He eyed her wistfully.

"Take care," he said; "every man has his weakness, which is to him as his vulnerable heel to Achilles; and mine is to be trusted in—blindly. That you cannot do."

"Why not?" she asked, looking up with flushed face and kindling glance; "why not?"

"What! even though that which I cannot and will not deny, which will grieve and wound you, should be brought up and laid before you? What even then?"

There was a brief pause; he eyed her keenly.

"Yes," she said, "even then."

"Promise."

"I promise."

A sudden change came over him; a flush rose to his brow; his look lit, his lip trembled. He drew her towards him, and looked down into her burning face; then stooped eagerly—to draw back, release her, and turn pale the next moment.

"Good night," said he, in a wholly altered tone; "it is late, I detain you not; rest well, you will need it—good night."

She left him, and went up to her room. The door stood half open; but though she had closed it carefully on leaving, she now heeded not this; there seemed a veil upon her eyes, and a mist on her thoughts. She paced the narrow room up and down with feverish haste, and asked herself one ceaseless question:

"What did he mean? What did he mean when he told me to promise—when he drew me towards him, and looked down into my face so eagerly? what did he mean then?"

Her brow throbbed and burned; her veins seemed running fire, and her head swam for a moment. The atmosphere of the room felt stifling; she opened her window, leaned her burning brow against the iron bar of the little balcony, and offered it to the cool night air.

There is a calm and solemn beauty in the aspect of the night, which soothes down the fevered and over-wrought spirit to its own deep and holy repose; the scenes we gaze on daily then borrow from the hour a shadowy and mysterious loveliness. To behold in gloom that which we have never seen but in the free and open light of day, is to enter on a new and unknown world. where all looks strange, indistinct, and vast.

As Nathalie gazed on the scene below her, she felt in her something of that secret communion which never wholly ceases between nature and the human heart. The moon shone dimly with a vague and doubtful light, ever and anon obscured by dark and swiftly-passing clouds. It had been raining, as she could feel by the humid freshness of the air; a few drops still fell with the murmuring gusts of wind that swept along the garden avenues, and slowly died away in their distant recesses. The tall and shadowy lime-trees of the avenue waved in dark masses against the gloomy sky; sometimes the whole garden lay wrapped in silent obscurity, until the breeze rose, and with many vague murmurs, swept the clouds away, and the moon dimly shining, revealed the contrast of the dark *parterres*, with their white gravel-walks, and some pale and solitary statue faintly gleaming through the gloom of its niche.

The silence and freshness of the hour gradually calmed Nathalie; her brow no longer throbbed and burned, and her pulse ceased to beat feverishly. The slight delirium which had agitated her vanished; she abandoned herself to thought, in a mood now chastened and subdued, when a sound below arrested her attention. She eagerly bent over the balcony, and looked, but all she could see was, that two figures emerged through the glass door from the library. They paused awhile, in low converse, on the stone steps which led into the garden; then one of the figures re-entered the apartment; the other remained standing for full five minutes in the same spot, without so much as changing its attitude. Nathalie thought she recognized Monsieur de Sainville; but who was the other?—

some servant; his nephew, perhaps! What could they be doing there at that hour?

Monsieur de Sainville—for she now knew that it was he—moved on, and entered one of the walks. For some time she could distinguish his receding figure; finally it vanished. It was a full half-hour before he re-appeared, coming at a slow pace along a walk exactly opposite her. The moon now shone bright and clear; the lights fell full on his face. Nathalie could see every feature as distinctly as by day; at first, his folded arms and downcast glance made her feel doubtful—she might well have been deceived; but when he suddenly paused, and looked up, she could not doubt—it was sadness, yes, deep sadness every grave feature betrayed. He paced the alley to and fro; she watched, with feverish interest, the moment of his return, but every time his countenance met her look, it wore the same mournful meaning. Why was he sad? Was the memory of old times with him? Did it haunt him still, when years, and the impassable barrier of the grave, both bade him to forget? One moment she felt saddened; but the next, a voice whispered in her heart; "You are young and beautiful; you know it; he knows it, too—why, then, need you care for the past?"

A low knock at the door disturbed her; she went and found Amanda standing in the dark corridor, with a light in her hand.

"How fortunate that mademoiselle is not yet undressed," she exclaimed; "Madame so much wishes to speak to mademoiselle."

"To speak to me!" said Nathalie, much surprised. Amanda quietly assented.

Nathalie thoughtfully followed her down stairs. "How is Madame Marceau now?" she asked, as they reached the first floor-landing.

"Much better. Dr. Laurent has given her a composing draught."

"Will mademoiselle wait here, whilst I go in?" whispered Amanda.

She handed the light she held to Nathalie, who entered the drawing-room; Amanda opened the door of Madame Marceau's room. She did not close it, and the sound of voices within reached Nathalie's ear.

"Charles," said the feverish voice of Madame Marceau, "remember you have given me your word!"

"Be content," he replied rather impatiently; "I will not breathe a word you would wish unsaid."

He came out and entered the drawing-room as he spoke.

"May I speak to you?" he asked in his low musical tones, and approaching the spot where Nathalie stood.

She coldly assented. The short dialogue she had chanced to overhear, gave her little relish for a conversation which it seemed was to be subject to the proud lady's restrictions.

"Did my sudden return offend you?" he asked.

"Offend me, sir? Why should it?"

"True; what is it to you?"

He looked at her; the resigned expression of her countenance stung him more deeply than anger.

"So!" he exclaimed, "you are still pitiless?—still inexorable?"

She could not repress a haughty smile.

"Inexorable, sir! This implies resentment;—I feel none. The harm you may once have done me, has long been repaired by other members of your family."

"I understand,—my uncle;—and is it for his sake you are so good as not to hate me?"

Their looks met; there was little love on either side.

"Sir," calmly answered Nathalie, "I must remove this mistake of yours once for all. I give you my word that I have never hated you, that I do not hate you, and that were we both to live until the end of time, nothing should ever induce me to hate you."

Charles Marceau eyed her from head to foot, with a look and smile that lived for years in the memory of the young girl; but he said in his bland voice,—

"Your goodness overpowers me; but I shall try, nay, I shall seek opportunities, to deserve it,—believe me I shall."

Nathalie involuntarily shrank from him.

"I hope," she began, but her voice faltered—

"You hope," softly echoed Charles.

"I mean to say—"

"You mean to say," he kindly repeated—

"I mean to say, sir," she impetuously exclaimed, "that such affection as yours takes the shape of persecution."

"You amaze me!" he replied with imperturbable coolness. "Persecution! How could I suspect any thing of the kind, when you so very kindly assured me of your perfect indifference?"

The temper of the Sainville race, to use a favorite expression of Madame Marceau, was not a gentle temper, but no one could deny that it was self-possessed. That almost unruffled and aristocratic smoothness of manner which, with every difference of character, nevertheless marked Monsieur de Sainville, his sister, and her son, had often struck Nathalie, and because it was precisely that which she herself wanted, it awed and subdued her vehement nature. What had she to fear from Charles Marceau's resentment? Nothing that she knew of; yet as she saw him standing there before her, and gazed at his pale handsome face, and felt his oblique look upon her, she trembled and turned pale. He looked at her, smiled, quietly said he could see she was in no mood to listen to him, and left the room. Almost immediately Amanda's head appeared through the half-open door, and she signed Nathalie to follow her.

She found Madame Marceau sitting, or rather reclining, in a deep arm-chair near the bed; a night-lamp burned with a dim and subdued light on a low table near her; the room looked indistinct, and wellnigh dark. Nathalie approached the arm-chair; it was a high-backed sombre-looking thing, framed by that dark background, the sick lady's face looked ghastly pale, and her sunken eyes shone with unnatural fire. The young girl asked how she felt.

"Much better, Petite; much better, Petite."

She spoke fast and feverishly. Nathalie looked at her; she had not undressed; her toilet was, as usual, elaborate and rich, the result of all skilful Amanda's art, but Nathalie felt no mortal hand could now efface the signet of death from that brow.

"Come and sit here by me," said the lady, "I disturbed you, but I could not help it; I could not wait until morning, —come and sit here by me."

The young girl complied, and asked how she had chanced to be taken ill so suddenly.

"Never mind, Petite; let us come to the point: what have you decided?"

As she spoke, she took her hand, and fastened on her face an eager and burning look.

"Decided! madame?"

"Yes; what have you decided?"

"Decided about what?"

"About my son, of course."

"Your son!"

"Good heavens! why do you repeat my words so? Did you not see Charles this evening? Do you not know he is come back—come back to remain?"

"This hint was not needed," cried Nathalie, coloring deeply, and rising as she spoke.

"What do you mean?" abruptly asked Madame Marceau. "I do not understand you. Do you mean to say that Armand has never hinted this to you? That when he returned to the library, where you waited so long, he never told you?"

Nathalie quickly turned round. How did Madame Marceau know she had been in the library? that she had waited there for his return? Had he told her? Why so? What did it mean? She felt and looked bewildered.

"Told me what?" she asked, at length. The lady did not reply, but looked slightly embarrassed. "Told me what?" resumed Nathalie; "that as your son remains, I had best leave? Was it that?"

"Leave!" echoed the lady, smiling; "how could you imagine any thing so ungracious? Fie! leave! no—remain."

"Remain! madame; remain!"

"Yes; remain."

"But how can that be?"

Madame Marceau gently made her resume her seat, laid her hand on Nathalie's shoulder, and smiled in her face.

"As my son's wife," she softly said.

She bent and pressed her hot, feverish lips on the young girl's brow.

Nathalie felt and looked like one who has received a sudden unseen blow.

"For heaven's sake, Petite," observed Madame Marceau, taking out her vinaigrette, "let us not have a scene; my nerves are weak. Armand might have told you, and spared me this."

"He knows it! he knows it!" cried Nathalie, seizing the lady's arm, and fastening a burning look full in her face.

"Knows it! of course. Did not Charles ask his consent, and did he not give it most readily? Do not look incredulous, Petite; it is so—upon my word, it is so. It was this evening, whilst you were sitting below, waiting for him—he sat there, just where you are sitting now, by me—Charles put it to him, in plain speech: 'Uncle,' he said, 'do you give your consent?' 'I do.' 'Full and free?' 'Full and free.' 'I can ask Made moiselle Montolieu to marry me?' 'You can.' 'And if she consents, you raise no objection?' 'None; why should I?' 'Even if she agrees to a speedy union, you still consent?' 'I still consent.' 'You will not urge youth, want of fortune, or prudential considerations?' 'I shall urge nothing. I am rich; neither you nor your wife need feel anxious about the future; I give to this marriage the freest, fullest consent man can give.' Upon my word, Petite, you look as if you did not believe me; but go down to the library—I can hear him there still—go down, ask him, and see if he denies one word of it—see if he does."

Nathalie did not reply; but she dropped the lady's arm, and sank back on her seat, mute and pale. Madame Marceau resignedly applied her vinaigrette.

"I know," she said, in a melancholy tone, "those things never go off without some emotion; but pray, be collected, my dear child. Here comes Charles."

Nathalie looked up slowly. The young man stood before her, in a grave, attentive attitude. She looked from him to the pale countenance and sunken eyes of his mother; both faces had but one meaning; they were waiting; still Nathalie did not speak.

"May I know Mademoiselle Montolieu's reply?" at length asked the young man.

She said nothing. She seemed to be struggling against some inward thought; to seek to comprehend some perplexing and baffling mystery. Madame Marceau quietly took her hand, and signing her son to approach, placed that passive hand in his; but scarcely had his hot and eager fingers closed on it, than Nathalie withdrew it, roused at once.

"This cannot be," she said in a low tone.

"Come, do not be childish, Petite. I consent; my brother Armand, Monsieur de Sainville, consents; he consents, I tell you, he consents."

"And approves," softly added Charles.

"And approves," eagerly echoed his mother.

"Warmly approves the object of my choice," continued the young man, with an impertinent self-congratulation, which even at that moment stung Nathalie.

"Of course," gayly replied Madame Marceau; "do you remember what he said when he came home after so many years? Charles, marry whom you like, but for heaven's sake give me a pretty niece."

"Yes, I remember," slowly replied her son, looking at Nathalie as he spoke.

"And where could even he, so hard, so difficult to please, find a more charming niece?" said Madame Marceau, in a caressing tone.

Every hue from the deepest crimson to the palest white passed over Nathalie's cheek, as Madame Marceau spoke thus, in a slow measured tone, that let word by word fall on the ear. She rose, and said briefly. "Let those who like, give their consent: I withhold mine."

Madame Marceau was going to speak; her son checked her with a look.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu has decided too hastily," he said, in a peculiar tone; "she must be allowed time to reflect."

He left the room. There was a long silence. Nathalie had not moved; she stood in the same spot, her look fastened on the floor, her hands clasped together. Madame Marceau eyed her very attentively.

"Petite," she at length said in her kindest tones, "come and sit here by me; let us understand each other."

"Madame," replied Nathalie, without looking up, "there is nothing to understand. What I have said is said; explanations are useless."

"Then you refuse to come and sit here."

She did not answer, but looked troubled.

"Will you, or will you not?" asked the lady. "I shall know how to interpret the refusal."

Nathalie complied silently, she resumed her seat; her look was averted from that of Madame Marceau. But the lady raised herself up, entwining one arm around the young girl's neck, and placing the other hand on her shoulder, compelled her to look round, so that their eyes met.

"So," said she, patting her playfully on the neck,—"so, Petite, for we two are going to have a friendly chat."

Nathalie instinctively endeavored to draw back, but the arm which held her, held her firmly.

"No, Petite," continued Madame Marceau, shaking her head with a smile, "not yet! Why our friendly *causerie* is not yet begun! So you will not have my poor boy; you must have some reason."

"No, madame, none," was the quick reply.

"No reason! Look at what I have already gained!"

"I mean no particular reason."

"Therefore a general one?" No reply. "The general reason is, after all, I suspect a particular one; you will not tell, but I am resolved to know. I must guess."

Nathalie endeavored to rise, to disengage herself from Madame Marceau, but the sick lady's grasp, though light, was firm as steel. She held Nathalie literally fastened to her chair.

"You foolish child," said she with a soft low laugh; "your *confidante* I must and will be. Only tell me if I guess well. Your reason is——" she paused and smiled as Nathalie's color faded away before her look—"pride," she added quietly, whilst the young girl breathed freely.

"You see," calmly resumed Madame Marceau, "you might as well have confided in me at once. I am not blind. Women may deceive men, but never one another. No woman can keep a secret from another woman. There is a freemasonry between us all, is there not, Petite?"

"I suppose so, madame," was the faint reply.

"I am sure of it. Besides, is not observation the mother of discovery? Then know, that having observed much since my return from Paris, I have discovered a great deal. Amongst other things, that you are too proud to enter a family in which you imagine you are received only in compliance with the wishes of an impassioned young man. Now, Petite, I might prove to you that this is a mistake, that we desired, and long ago approved unconditionally, what has been mentioned today; but as you object to explanation, and as I have ascertained your 'reason;' why let the matter rest."

She released her as she spoke; but Nathalie, though free, did not move now.

"Who desired, who approved long ago?" she asked with a fixed look.

"We did, Petite."

"Madame, whom do you mean by we?"

"The uncle and mother of Charles, of course."

"You said, 'this evening,' awhile back; you said 'this evening'!"

"Yes, it was this evening Charles asked his uncle's consent. But *we* had spoken of this often before."

Nathalie rose and paced the room up and down; then suddenly coming back to the lady's chair, she feverishly asked:

"Was it this he meant, when he asked me the other day, to like Sainville?"

"I dare say it was," composedly replied Madame Marceau.

"Was it this he meant, when he said this evening: remain my child, remain?"

"I dare say it was."

"But why not speak more clearly?"

Madame Marceau smiled.

"Armand was always mysterious. It is one of his weaknesses to think no one can read him. But in all this he has not acted like a wary man of business; he has trifled and delayed; and I, ignorant woman as I am, know this is not wise. The truth is, often as we have talked the matter over and settled every thing——"

"Settled every thing; settled!" interrupted Nathalie, in a broken tone; "I have been strangely used! Am I not flesh and blood? Have I no feeling, no heart, that I am thus disposed of?"

She was very pale, and trembled from head to foot; her eyes flashed indignantly, her blanched lips quivered.

"Does it make you indignant, that I should seek in you a daughter, and my brother a niece?"

"A niece! You may tell your brother, madame, that I decline the honor; or rather I shall tell him so myself."

"Oh! you will!" cried Madame Marceau with a withering look; "you need not, Petite. He knows it; he let me see he knew you would refuse; he let me see he knew your motives too."

"What if he did?" said Nathalie, turning round; "what if he did: it is for you and your son to care—not for me!"

"What do you mean by saying it is for me and my son to care?" asked Madame Marceau, turning very pale and speaking very low.

"What I say."

"You confess it! you dare to confess it!" cried she, rising and crimsoning with sudden passion, "and you taunt me with it too! Shameless girl!" She trembled with resentment. "Well, why not go on?" she added, in a quick broken tone. "Tell me all—I can bear it—I understand the wisdom of waiting now—before or after the funeral—Eh!"

Nathalie stepped back; she thought her delirious. But Madame Marceau followed her and grasped her arm firmly.

"How dare you," she exclaimed again, "how dare you confess such a thing? Other women shrink and blush—and you . . . . go!"

She dropped her arm as a thing she had held too long

Nathalie turned white and red alternately, and looked as if she would sink into the earth; but making an effort, she said: "What do you mean? I told your brother six months ago, that I never could love your son—no more! What did he say to you? What do you mean?"

Madame Marceau eyed her fixedly; as she looked, a change came over her features. She turned away, and walked up and down the room with a steady step—a thing she had not done for weeks—but fever made her strong. She gave the young girl one or two quick guarded glances, but she did not reply. Nathalie walked up to her.

"What did he say,—what do you mean?" she asked.

"Nothing—I have been hasty—cruel; but I was excited; I am excitable to-night. He told me—let me see—Yes, that you could not like Charles—that was it—no more; do not imagine he said more. There, be content—it is late; good night."

She turned away; but Nathalie followed her and caught hold of her garment.

"Madame, what do you mean?"

"Mean!—nothing!"

"What did he say?"

Madame Marceau looked very grave.

"My brother," she said, "is a grave man, little accustomed to women or young girls. I have noticed how embarrassed he often felt in the proper regulation of his behavior towards you; but, touchy as you are, you have no reason to complain of the host, of the man of the world,—above all, of the man of honor."

"I do not complain, I ask a question."

"And look dreadfully suspicious too? Do you imagine we had no other subjects of conversation than you or your motives for refusing Charles? Do not imagine he said any thing particular? I tell you he is a man of honor."

"And why do you tell me that?"

"Because you might imagine——"

"Imagine what?"

"Nothing—I feel very fatigued. Good night."

She kissed her; but Nathalie did not move.

"Imagine what?" she repeated.

"You foolish child! I tell you he told me nothing."

"Told you nothing—what had he to tell?"

"Be satisfied, I tell you; he is a man of strict honor."

"Who doubts it? I do not; I will not doubt it," passionately cried Nathalie.

"I hope not, Mademoiselle Montolieu," very seriously replied Madame Marceau, resuming her seat as she spoke. "It is going on to two. Does it not strike you it is time this should cease? Good night. My nerves have been tried long enough. I must say I think it was unkind of Armand to leave this to me, in order to spare his own feelings. Very unkind. But the truth is, he did not know, I believe, how to break the tidings to you, and he certainly has a great horror of scenes, and woman's tears."

"Madame," said Nathalie, pressing her hand to her brow, as if to compel thought to remain calm, "it is clear he has spoken more freely than you confess. What is it?"

"You urge me to a breach of confidence."

"I ask to know what I have a right to know."

"A right—then I will not utter a word."

"If you will not tell me, he shall."

She made a step forward.

"Stay!" cried Madame Marceau, with sudden alarm. "Stay! are you mad? Will nothing cool your hot southern blood?"

"Speak," cried Nathalie, turning round upon her; "speak, and do not torture me any longer."

"Torture you! You certainly use strange and picturesque expressions? Am I an inquisitor? Is it not to spare your feelings that I do not speak; that I do not wish you to see Armand? It is a delicate thing for him, for any man, to read the feelings of a young girl, and tell her with his own lips what he has read. I know I have said too much, but if you will promise to be calm and patient——"

"I will, I will," replied Nathalie, in a subdued tone; "I will; but speak, for heaven's sake speak." She resumed her seat, and spoke as if to wait even one second were utterly intolerable.

Madame Marceau eyed her compassionately, and said with evident hesitation:

"Poor little thing! Nothing so peculiar was said. There were only vague hints about the odd fancies of young girls,—fancies on which it was good to close one's eyes,—nay, even to indulge."

"He said this!" ejaculated Nathalie, pressing her hand to her brow.

"Hinted, Petite! hinted. Indeed he spoke most kindly, most compassionately. 'Time,' he asserted, 'must be left to do its own work.' I saw he was pained, for your sake, at any little weaknesses he might have detected."

"Weaknesses,—my weaknesses!" exclaimed Nathalie. "It is false! I have not been forward, or unwomanly? It is false."

"Petite, you are growing very unreasonable. He said, emphatically, that your weaknesses were essentially womanly."

Nathalie did not heed her. She had risen from her seat, and was agitatedly pacing the room up and down, pressing both her hands to her bosom, as if to stay its tumultuous throbbings. Her brow was contracted, her look fixed, her breath came fast through her pale and parted lips.

"God help me!" she exclaimed, in a low tone; "God help me!"

"Petite, you are getting excited. Must I tell you again, that Armand is the soul of delicacy and honor."

"Honor!" echoed Nathalie; "God save me from man, and the false thing called man's honor."

She stopped short in the centre of the room, with upraised look and clasped hands; whilst tears—not of those which relieve, but of those which are wrung from the heart's bitterest agony—slowly rolled down her cheeks.

Madame Marceau watched her with sufficient calmness; yet she looked faint and pale, and repeatedly used her vinaigrette.

"Petite," she said, "do not afflict yourself; I see Armand was greatly mistaken. But you can prove it to him; not by saying so,—delicacy forbids it,—but by quietly agreeing to marry Charles. Shall I call him?—Yes."

She raised her voice; the door opened; her son entered, and came up to Nathalie. She did not allow either to speak, but said, quickly:

"Charles, the poor child is still much agitated; but you may trust to me. It is all right. Petite, calm yourself. It is a trying moment; but such things must be. With all your heedlessness, you have much penetration and good sense. Apply both to the present case. You need it. Ah! Petite, when you have my experience, my knowledge of life; when you have reflected on human nature, and looked, considered, and compared——"

Charles frowned, and gave his mother a keen look; Nathalie, awakening as from a dream, eyed Madame Marceau with a perplexed air, as she continued, with unmoved composure and undiminished fluency of speech:

"Yes, when you have reflected on human nature, looked, considered, and compared, you must come to the same painful conclusions at which I have, alas! arrived But do not fear; my affection, my experience, shall watch over you;—and now it is really late. Good night, Petite; good night."

Nathalie did not answer. Madame Marceau's speech had given the fever of heart and brain time to cool. Diverted for a moment, thought had returned, but not alone; for with it came doubt, suspicion, and tardy penitence. All the time Madame Marceau spoke, she had eyed her keenly, but without seeking to fathom the meaning of her discourse. She was reading the lines of her brow, the restless look of her eyes, the unsteady motion of her lips; and it seemed as if a voice rose in her soul, and cried out, "She is false! she is false!"

"Good night, Petite," repeated Madame Marceau.

"Stay," said her son, "can I know——"

"You shall not torment her," hastily interrupted his mother.

"I am grieved——" began Nathalie.

"There! you have grieved her!" indignantly said the lady.

"Madame, I do not complain," resumed Nathalie.

"You are an angel! But I am not going to see your feelings tried and wounded. Good night!"

"Do you, or do you not consent?" asked Charles, impatiently addressing the young girl.

His mother vainly strove to interfere.

"No, sir," had fallen from Nathalie's lips.

"No!" echoed Charles; and an angry light passed over his dark features.

"Quite right," said his mother; "I admire your strong sense of feminine dignity, Petite. I had told you, sir. it was all right."

"Madame." interrupted Nathalie, with much decision, "I beg to state I have never given any thing like consent."

"You have not!"

"No, madam; I have not."

"Petite," said the lady, with a bitter smile; "I see Armand was right; that I was mistaken; that the freemasonry of women is nonsense after all."

The sting went home, but pierced deeper than Madame Marceau thought.

"You mistake, madame," replied Nathalie, in a low tone; "one woman cannot deceive another woman."

"Explain yourself!" said Madame Marceau, with imperative calmness,—the calmness of suppressed passion.

Nathalie did not reply.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," resumed the lady, laying some stress on the plebeian name, "you are not sufficiently versed in the science of good breeding to know that there is a polite way of expressing doubt. I believe you mentioned something about your intention to leave;—there was something of the kind."

She spoke as of occurrences the most remote; applied her vinaigrette, and wrapped her shawl around her. It was as if she had brought the young girl from Mademoiselle Dantin's only the preceding evening, so completely had her old manner returned.

"Madame," quietly said Nathalie, "do not think I shall leave this house without seeing and speaking to Monsieur de Sainville."

The lady's composure vanished at once.

"Do you mean to breed strife between my brother and me?' she sharply asked.

"And what has he to do with this?" no less sharply asked her son. "Let him—let any man—dare to stand between me and the woman I love!"

Madame Marceau glanced from her son to Nathalie. She breathed hard, and clasped her hands firmly together. There was something like despair in the forced calmness of her look.

"Charles," she said, in a low tone, "are you mad or blind? Leave us; I must reason with this foolish girl,—leave us!"

"I have long enough been kept in the dark," he replied, without moving; I will know more. Why did you write to me to come without delay,—to lose no time?"

"Heaven help me!" cried Madame Marceau, with a passion that brought a flush to her very brow; "heaven help me; between you both! . . . . And here he is!" she added, as a step was heard on the stairs. "Do your worst."

Monsieur de Sainville entered. He gave a keen, rapid glance around him, then came forward, and paused before the chair of his sister.

"Rosalie," said he, severely, "you had given me your word that you would not excite yourself to-night; you had given me your word that Mademoiselle Montolieu would not be disturbed to-night."

"And I broke it!" replied his sister, with a look of defiance "How kind, Armand, to remind me of that! Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added," turning towards her, "you will not leave without an explanation,—you who are so mortally offended with my brother for noticing your little peculiarities of feeling ——"

"What is the meaning of this?" sternly asked Monsieur de Sainville, glancing from his sister to Nathalie, who changed color; "Mademoiselle Montolieu mortally offended with me! Why so? For noting her peculiarities of feeling, too! What peculiarities?"

"Peculiarities, indeed!" bitterly echoed Madame Marceau; "peculiarities which I have long noticed—peculiarities ill becoming the maiden selected to become my daughter, and your niece."

"The selection was none of mine," dryly replied Monsieur de Sainville, without seeming to notice the sudden paleness and burning flush which, as his sister spoke, had succeeded each other on the young girl's cheek.

"You gave your consent; deny it if you can—you gave your consent, Armand."

"I had no earthly right to withhold it; Charles was his own master."

"But you did not object—no, not one objection did you raise: you know you did not. Far from it; you approved—you found nothing to object to in Mademoiselle Montolieu for your niece."

She spoke triumphantly; he did not reply at once.

There was a pause. Charles, Nathalie, Madame Marceau—all three looked at Monsieur de Sainville, and those three looks had but one expression—ardent curiosity and expectation. He only looked at his sister, with severe compassion in every feature.

"Rosalie," said he, "you place me in a singularly difficult position; yet such is my faith in Mademoiselle Montolieu's candor and good sense, that I do not hesitate to declare that, had I been called upon to select a wife for Charles, which I have not, and have never been, she is the very last person I should have chosen for him."

There was another pause, or rather a dead silence. Charles Marceau stepped one pace forward to look at his uncle; ill-suppressed resentment lit up every dark feature. His mother was mortally pale; she applied her vinaigrette, and looked as if she needed its use.

"Are you offended?" asked Monsieur de Saniville, addressing Nathalie, who, with her face averted from him, and buried in her hands, now sat on a chair weeping silently.

She slowly turned round, on hearing his kind and low voice; raised her face, but not her eyes, and answered, almost inaudibly, "No, sir." And every feature looked transformed; and it was as if the halo of some radiant happiness had fallen around her.

"Why not also favor us with your motives, Armand?" asked his sister, with a burning glance.

"If Mademoiselle Montolieu desires it," said he, very coolly. "I shall, indeed, be quite ready to do so."

"No, no," she quickly replied, whilst a crimson hue passed over her features; "I am convinced, sir, you meant nothing offensive: that is enough."

"Yes," bitterly said Madame Marceau, "that is enough; for I see I have led to a most agreeable explanation: but it is not over yet—no, it is not over yet."

"Rosalie," observed her brother with something like kindness, "let us drop the subject."

His sister did not reply; the hand which held the vinaigrette shook violently, but her eye was unquailing and unconquered; resolve, will, and defiance were in her mien.

"I will not let it drop," said she, in a broken and husky tone: "I will not. We shall see if you and she are ever to be in the right; if I am to be to my face accused of falsehood and treachery; I will have an explanation—a clear explanation."

"Madame," interposed Nathalie, in a low tone, "I grant, that I misunderstood you."

"Then perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what extraordinary construction you put on my words! I ask to be instructed—I want to know, Mademoiselle Montolieu; will you, then, I say, be good enough to tell me what construction you put upon my words?"

"I repeat, madame, that I misunderstood you—what more can I say?"

"And is it my fault if you misunderstood me?" feverishly exclaimed the sick lady; "did I not, over and over again, beseech you to be calm? Did I not repeatedly tell you, you were quite wrong; that you, that any woman—that any one might trust to my brother's sense of honor?"

Monsieur de Sainville looked up.

"And what can have been said affecting my honor?" he imperatively asked.

"No matter what, Armand; enough to make her doubt it," replied his sister, who had arrived at such a state of exasperation, that she cared not how deep she fell, provided she dragged down Nathalie with her.

"She never doubted it," briefly said Monsieur de Sainville, steadily eyeing Nathalie as he spoke. The young girl shrank from his glance. "She never doubted it," he repeated.

"No, of course not," cried his sister, feeling that her vengeance had come. "no, of course not, Armand; whilst I kept remonstrating with her, urging her to reflection, to confidence in your honor, she did not exclaim, 'God save me from the false thing called man's honor!' Oh, no, it is I misunderstood, I who invented it of course."

Monsieur de Sainville did not heed her; he was looking at Nathalie, who had sunk back on her seat speechless, and—though she bit her lip until the blood came—deadly pale. Monsieur de Sainville rose and paced the room, not agitatedly; he had never seemed more sedate, but yet as if striving against some inward emotion, probably wrath, for his eyes had an angry gleam, and his lips slight nervous twitchings. He at length came and paused before Nathalie; she trembled visibly. Madame Marceau eyed her with a fiery look, Charles with a lowering glance.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu did you utter those words?"

She did not answer.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he repeated in a deeper and more thrilling accent, "did you or did you not utter those words?"

There was something almost beseeching in his tone; something that pierced her heart with the most exquisite sorrow. She felt like the the faithless disciple after he had denied his Divine Master, and, like him, turning her head away, she wept bitterly.

What reply could have been more eloquent than this silence. He stood there a while longer, eyeing her with a stern smile, then silently turned away.

"There was a promise which you made a few hours ago," he resumed after a pause.

"Yes, sir," she replied in a low tone.

"I release you from it," he calmly said.

Nathalie looked up; her very brow had colored: her lips trembled with indignant resentment; but the marble mantelpiece against which he now leaned, was not more cold and unmoved than Monsieur de Sainville.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* how sorry, how very sorry, I am." soothingly exclaimed Madame Marceau. "Is it possible that I should have done so much mischief? My dear Armand, let me remonstrate with you. If Mademoiselle Montolieu has been too hasty, yet pray remember that she is still my future daughter, your future niece."

"What! she has consented!" he exclaimed with an involuntary start.

His look was suddenly riveted on Nathalie. She did not shrink from it; far from it; she met his eye steadily; but the glance that sought hers was one that repelled scrutiny; her look was deep, brief, and searching, but she felt, and felt truly, that it was baffled.

Nathalie turned away with a troubled look; she was evidently much agitated, and abstractedly pressed her hands together; but suddenly her emotion subsided, and her glance was steady, her voice was firm, as she addressed Madame Marceau.

"Madame," she said with something like dignity, "I appreciate the generosity of feeling which, in spite of all that has passed, induces you to consider the relation you contemplated between us as unbroken."

"Then after all you consent," exclaimed the lady, looking more astonished than pleased at the effect her generosity had produced.

"I ask for time to reflect," said Nathalie in a low tone.

"You have had time enough," imperatively said the lady.

But without heeding her speech, her son came forward; he had remained apart silent, his eyes downcast, his arms folded, apparently unmoved, yet losing nothing of all that passed from the lowest word to the most trifling gesture; pausing before Nathalie, he said in his low voice,—

"I grant it."

The tone was courteous, but when Nathalie looked up and met his eye, when she also met the look of Monsieur de Sainville, she felt that whatever her final answer might be. she had given the young man a claim over her, and taken one of those steps that are not retraced in the journey of life.

Nor did Charles Marceau seem unaware of the ground he had won back. His tone, as we have said, was courteous, his attitude deferential, yet through both pierced the secret consciousness that the haughty beauty, who had rejected him twice within a few hours, had now stepped down from her pedestal to be wooed, won, and perchance slighted in her turn, like any other mortal maiden.

CHAPTER XXII.

There is something beautiful and touching in the custom prevalent in Catholic countries, of leaving the churches open from morning until a late evening hour; so that all may enter them freely for devotion and prayer.

No doubt, prayer, as an attribute of the spirit, may be exercised every where. There is no need of holy shrines or consecrated walls to usher man into the divine presence; and the glorious and magnificent works of God call the soul far more eloquently to religious worship than all the pomp and pride with which man ever arrayed the perishable fabric of his temples. Yet the link which binds us to the house of prayer is both deep and holy; it is felt in the sunny village church, as well as in the solemn cathedral, with legendary fanes faintly gleaming through gathering gloom. The spot where human beings have knelt in worship, where they have poured forth their souls in prayer, and yearned towards a purer existence, is sanctified to man for evermore. We cannot behold unmoved the place which has witnessed so much human joy, and, perchance, also, so much human sorrow; the sanctuary which remained ever open to the weary pilgrims of humanity,—a silent and isolated refuge amidst the strife and turmoil of life.

A few days after the incidents recorded in the last chapter, Rose Montolieu left the house of her aunt at twilight, and turning round the angle of the narrow court, entered the old abbey, through a low side-door, which yielded to her touch, swung noiselessly on its hinges, and silently closed behind her. The interior aspect of the church was simple, and even severe. The walls were bare, and the whole of the edifice was imperfectly lit; tall pillars sprang up to the arched roof, and vanished in its deepening obscurity; the distant altar was dimly visible at the end of the long nave, where only a few poor women now knelt in prayer, for this was not the hour of any religious service.

Rose took her usual place, in the sheltering obscurity of a massive pillar; there she sat, her forehead buried in her hands, not praying in actual language, but yielding up her soul to communion with God. This was the only mystic and imaginative feature of her piety, or, indeed, of her character; both of which were essentially practical and severe. Nathalie loved her sister, and respected her deeply; yet she could not conceal from herself that Rose was not winning, amiable or gentle. The sight of her goodness strengthened the soul, because it was from a heroic soul that it sprang; it left the heart unmoved, because, to say the truth, in that goodness the heart had no part. But what surprised Nathalie still more was that her sister, with her fervent faith and deep piety, was yet painfully skeptical on other subjects. In vain did she seek to hide how deeply she doubted of all that the human heart most desires to be true,—of virtue, devotedness, love, and friendship, and, above all, of earthly happiness,—her doubt could not be concealed; its shadow always fell like a sudden and death-like chill on the light and life of her young sister's heart.

Faith in heaven does not necessarily imply skepticism in human nature, or in things of earth. We may believe in the divine, and not deny humanity; we may, but some minds—and Rose was of these—cannot. Their religion springs from the longing love of the ideal, from the weariness of earth, from the deep and still unsatisfied aspirations towards excellence. This piety, though fervent, true, and zealous, is little liked or approved. The world naturally prefers cheerful piety—that gentle offspring of hearts, happy by nature, or whom sorrow only chastens: who, indeed, would not love it? But can all feel it equally? Are there not too many to whom religion is essentially a refuge, who cling to it as shipwrecked mariners cling to a last plank of safety, who obey its behests, and fulfil its duties faithfully; but who fail in the charm that renders either the faith or the disciple attractive,—who love little, and are still less loved? Can these be gay, happy, and free givers of the charities of life? Yet how harsh, how severe, is the world to them! It upbraids them with not being that which they could not possibly be; it calls their faith cheerless, gloomy, and desponding; and it never asks itself how, unless through a miracle, sweet waters could flow from the source of an embittered heart!

Yes, it is true, their faith is indeed more akin to despair than to hope; and this is why they must believe; not to believe would be for them to perish irretrievably. Through their own folly, misfortune, or too clearsightedness, they have lost earth: be merciful—envy them not heaven.

Rose remained about an hour thus; she then left her seat, turned down one of the aisles, and passed by a retired chapel with a solitary lamp burning before its silent shrine. It was the chapel of the Virgin, whose pale sepulchral image rose over the altar. Pure and humble, with downcast eyes, and hands meekly folded on her bosom, she seemed to have just heard the salutation of the angels, and to be still replying: "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord." White vases filled with such white flowers as the season afforded, were the only ornaments of the altar; shrubs, with blossoms of the same chaste and virgin hue, were placed in a semicircle at its base; a low iron railing inclosed the shrine. Near that railing now knelt a woman, whose bowed head, clasped hand, and motionless attitude seemed to betoken earnest prayer.

The lamp which burned before the shrine was, according to the general custom, suspended by a long iron chain from the lofty roof: its light fell almost entirely within the inclosed area, and only one tremulous ray descended to the spot occupied by the stranger. Yet there was something in her figure, though shrouded by sombre outward garments, that seemed familiar to the eye of Rose, who involuntarily lingered near the spot. After awhile the stranger lifted up her head and leaned back, though still kneeling, with her look fixed on the altar; her veil was thrown back, and her countenance appeared fully revealed.

It was, as Rose had suspected, Nathalie; ay, Nathalie, but such as she had never yet seen her; sad, wan, and broken down by grief, with a troubled look and eyes dimmed by weeping. She was deadly pale, and the tears which still glistened on her cheek told, not less than her despairing and helpless attitude, of the vain struggle between the soul's prayer and the heart's passionate sorrow.

Rose eyed her sister with deep sadness, then stepped forward and lightly placed her hand on Nathalie's shoulder The young girl started, rose precipitately and drew her veil down; but she made no resistance when her sister took her arm within her own and led her away. They left the church by the front entrance, and neither spoke until they emerged from its sha dowy gloom into the moonlit space beyond. Rose paused on the first of the wide flight of steps; she was going to speak,—Nathalie checked her.

"I cannot stay.—I am in a great hurry.—I cannot."

They descended silently. At the bottom of the steps extended an open space with a row of trees on either side, and several wooden benches standing in the shade; mothers brought their children there in the day-time, but the spot was silent and lonely now. Rose arrested her sister as she was hurriedly walking on.

"We will sit here awhile," said she, pointing to one of the benches.

"But I cannot, Rose; I am in a great hurry."

"Why did you not call in?"

"Madame Marceau is worse, much worse; let me go."

"Why were you weeping in the chapel?" persisted Rose.

Her sister did not answer, but Rose, who still held her arm could feel her trembling.

"What has happened?" asked Rose.

"Nothing," replied Nathalie, avoiding her sister's searching glance; "the night air is chill. Let me go."

"The air is clear and mild; if you object to sitting we can walk up and down; but we shall not part thus."

There was a pause.

"Be it so," at length said Nathalie, in a wholly altered tone; "yes, as well now as later; yes, we will sit down and you shall hear me."

They seated themselves on a bench as she spoke; Nathalie raised her veil, and looking at her sister with a pale, determined face, she said, briefly:

"Rose, first know this—namely, that my resolve is taken; that much as I love and respect you, not all you can urge or entreat shall prevail against my will."

"And what is that will?" asked Rose, seeing that she paused.

"I am going to marry."

Rose remained speechless; she took both her sister's hands in her own, and eyed her attentively; their looks met, but Nathalie's face remained unaltered: the pale brow, fixed glance, and compressed lip, still told the same resolute will she had so clearly expressed, but they told no more. Neither the blush of the willing bride, nor the trembling fear of the unwilling one, were there.

"To marry whom?" at length asked Rose.

"The son of Madame Marceau."

"To marry him, Nathalie! what do you mean?"

"What I say, Rose."

"Do you mean to say you are going to marry the nephew of Monsieur de Sainville?" asked Rose, slightly bending forward.

Nathalie pressed her hand to her brow, but she calmly replied:

"Yes, Rose, I mean it."

There was a pause.

"Where is Monsieur Marceau?" quietly asked Rose.

"At Sainville."

"Has he been long there?"

"A few days."

"And he has asked you to marry him?"

"Yes, Rose, he has."

"And you are actually going to marry him?"

"I already told you so."

"You amaze me. Marry him!"

"For heaven's sake, Rose, do not be always repeating it."

"Does Madame Marceau consent?" continued Rose, without heeding this.

"Yes, she consents."

"And Monsieur de Sainville!" said Rose, slowly looking up at Nathalie.

"And pray what has Monsieur de Sainville to do with this?" asked Nathalie, biting her lip, but steadily meeting her sister's glance.

"Has *he* consented?" calmly inquired Rose.

"Who cares about his consent?" angrily exclaimed Nathalie; "I do not, Rose, mind—I do not."

"Then he has refused!" quickly said Rose.

Her sister smiled bitterly.

"Refused! Oh! Rose, you do not know him. Why, this is a matter that does not concern him; to refuse would be to meddle, to interfere; and he is too wise to do either."

"And you will be his niece?" resumed Rose, in a low tone.

Nathalie rose abruptly.

"Why not?" she feverishly exclaimed; "why not—why does it surprise you, Rose? What do you mean by being so surprised?"

Rose did not answer the question; but she eyed her sister steadily, as she said, in her lowest, but most distinct tones:

"Do you love Monsieur Marceau?"

There was a pause.

"I suppose I do," at length replied Nathalie.

"Speak plainly: do you love him?" Her voice rose; but that of Nathalie sank, as she replied:

"Why marry him, if I did not?"

They stood together in the pale moonlight; the elder sister bending a fixed and searching look on the younger one.

"I ask you, Nathalie, if you love that man?" repeated Rose with increasing earnestness.

"Rose," answered Nathalie, after a pause, "love is a strong word. Do women always marry for love—do they not rather marry, in order to secure a position and a home?"

"How worldly you have become!" ejaculated Rose: "a position and a home! Have you made conditions for either? No—then what home, what position will you have, if Monsieur de Sainville marries?"

"He will not," said Nathalie, abruptly looking up.

"How do you know?"

"His sister told me so," slowly replied the young girl.

"Is she your only authority?"

"He will not marry, Rose. He had, years ago, a disappointment—no matter what—he will not marry."

"A disappointment years ago!" echoed Rose; "what of that! Are you such a child, as to think that would influence him still? What is a first love? a breath, a dream; if it is thus even for women, what is it for men?

"He love again! Impossible, Rose he is a stone."

"I did not speak of love; it is not likely a man of his age would yield to that childish passion: men seldom marry for love after twenty-five—they cease to care, and believe in it, and yet they marry."

"Why, then, did he not marry?" asked Nathalie.

"Probably because he was devoted to a task which forebade him thinking of marriage. That task is over now; do you imagine he is going to devote himself to a cheerless and solitary life? His sister may do all she can to have it so; but if she fails—if he does marry, what position will you hold in Sainville, as his niece, or rather as the wife of a nephew, no longer his heir!"

"Rose, you are pitiless," exclaimed Nathalie, in a broken tone; "he married, and I residing at Sainville as the wife of his nephew! Oh! you are pitiless!"

"If you loved your future husband," inflexibly said Rose, "the prospect of a lost inheritance would not move you so."

"Love! and why on earth should I love?" bitterly exclaimed Nathalie. "Men do not love, you say,—and I believe it; why then should women? To consume their heart in dedesires for ever unfulfilled. Oh! Rose, you have too often warned me against this folly."

Rose laid her hand on her sister's arm.

"I will tell you why a woman should love her husband," she said calmly, "it is lest she should love another man. You think me cold and severe; perhaps I am so; the sorrows of a love-sick girl I might not pity much; I know how quickly they pass away. But, oh! Nathalie, I could pity, deeply pity, the woman striving against a guilty passion. Alas! how easily does the love that is permitted yield to weariness and time, but how fatal and enduring is the love that is forbidden; a fire ever hid, yet ever burning in the heart. But you say, perhaps, 'I will not love thus.' Do not deceive yourself; you are not cold or calm; mere domesticity will not charm you; if you do not love your husband, you will love some other."

"I will not," angrily cried Nathalie; "I will not; you insult me, Rose."

"I never said you would yield to your feelings, and sin; but do not mistake human freedom; our actions alone are ours, not, alas! our passions and our desires. Will can conquer love or hate; but it cannot annihilate them; either may perish, but not through us, Nathalie; not through us. Oh! they are relentless enemies, with whom there is no truce and no peace; who feed on the inward strife they themselves create. Brethren they will not be; nothing can they be save pitiless tyrants or rebellious slaves. And have you ever imagined what it is to belong to one man and to love another? to strive daily, hourly, against a passion that might have been perfectly innocent, but which one fatal error in your life has rendered for ever guilty? I grant that you subdue that passion; do you know at what cost the bitter victory is won? Do you know what sort of a feeling it is to subdue one's own heart, and feel its life-strings breaking? You have heard of martyrs! know that there are martyrs of the soul, whose agony the eye of God has alone beheld. Have you the faith, the fervor, the strength to endure that martyrdom? Oh! Nathalie, that struggle has unfathomed depths of bitterness, and you will have to drink of those bitter waters to the very dregs; your fate is before you; choose!'

"I will marry him!" said Nathalie, in a low and resolute tone; and she looked up, and met her sister's glance unshrinkingly.

"You will marry him?" sorrowfully echoed Rose.

"Rose," calmly replied her sister, "you have said many true things, but omitted others quite as true. Passions strive not only against us, but amongst themselves; strong are love and hate, but pride is mightier far; she can conquer both, and lay them,—struggling and rebellious if you will,—but subdued, nay, prostrate, beneath her feet. Think of that, and fear not for me."

She spoke with subdued energy, but with the energy of will, not that of emotion; no flush rose to her brow, no light kindled in her eyes, the very tones of her voice were equal and low, as she stood there, calm and pale in the moonlight,—it was as if some icy spell had fallen on that once fiery and vehement nature.

"I will pray for you," said Rose, who saw that, for the present, at least, remonstrance was wholly useless.

And thus they parted.

Rose was in the room of her aunt on the following morning, when Désirée opened the door, and said briefly:

"Your sister is below; she wants to speak to you."

"I should like to know what your sister wants with you at this hour?" peevishly asked Madame Lavigne, with whom, since she had ceased to be merry, Nathalie had suddenly fallen into disgrace. "You shall certainly not go until I am settled; it is very selfish of your sister to call at this hour."

It was a full half hour before she would allow Rose to depart; now she wanted a cushion,—now she wished for the table to be drawn towards her,—now there was an order to be given to Désirée; but at length she could find no further excuse for detaining her, and, not without a sharp recommendation not to be long away, she permitted her niece to go down.

As Rose paused near the door previous to opening it, she heard the sound of a hurried step within, pacing the room up and down; then there was a pause; her sister had stopped short, no doubt to listen. She opened: Nathalie was standing in the centre of the room with her eyes fastened on the door.

"Thank God! you are come," she quickly said "Oh! Rose, how could you keep me waiting so long?"

"What has happened?" asked Rose.

"Nothing, Rose. Why do you always think something has been happening?"

"But you have not come without a purpose."

"No, Rose; the truth is," she hesitatingly added, "I am not very well. Could I stay here—with you—for a few days?"

Rose looked at her with sorrowful seriousness.

"You are not well, Nathalie; but it is your soul, not your body, that is ailing. Oh! child, you know not how to tell untruths, and this one is too absurd. What change has come since last night? Why do you wish to be here?"

"Because, God help me! there is no other home for me," exclaimed Nathalie, in a despairing tone, that went to the heart of her sister; but she said quietly:

"And Sainville!"

"Sainville!" echoed Nathalie, "ay, it has been my home,—would it never had! Oh! fatal, very fatal, has been to me the hospitality of that house!"

And again she walked up and down the room, not weeping, but wringing her hands. The composure she had maintained on the preceding evening had now wholly vanished.

"What, then, becomes of your marriage with Charles Marceau?" asked Rose, eyeing her fixedly.

Nathalie suddenly stood still.

"If there is love or mercy in your soul," she passionately cried, "never speak of that marriage,—never couple that name with mine."

"Have you quarrelled with him?" inquired Rose.

"Quarrelled! and with him? No," almost disdainfully replied Nathalie.

"Then it is something between you and his mother?" persisted Rose.

Her sister shook her head with impatient denial.

"Or with Monsieur de Sainville?" continued Rose.

Nathalie turned round, as if something had stung her.

"It is not," she cried, angrily; "it is not. With him! Why, what has he to do with all this? Why do you always,—why does every one always taunt me with his name? I cannot understand it; I do not know what is meant by it; I will not allow it, Rose."

Her dark eyes lit, and her lips trembled, as she spoke.

"You have given me no answer," she added, after a pause; "can I, or can I not, stay here? It will not be for long."

"You can stay," replied Rose.

"And what will your aunt say?"

"I cannot tell. She will be vexed,—exasperated, perhaps."

"Then I will not come here, to be the source of trouble to you," sadly said Nathalie.

"But you shall come and stay," persisted her sister. "Have I no right in the house, where my youth has been spent and wasted for so many years? You shall stay, Nathalie."

The young girl seemed to breathe more freely; but as she sat down, and looked around her, her eyes filled with tears.

"There was a time," she said, in a low tone, "when I pitied you, Rose, for being buried in this living tomb; for then I rejoiced in the life and light of another dwelling: but now I am glad to come and share with you, in the shadow and gloom of this place; and it almost seems as if either could not be too heavy or too dark for me."

"That it is all over between you and Charles Marceau, I can see," said Rose, walking up to her sister, and laying her hand on her shoulder; "yet you say that you have not quarrelled. How is this?"

The head of Nathalie drooped on her bosom.

"How can I tell you!" she replied at length; "there is such a thing as a sudden awakening; and if I have awakened, will you reprove me, Rose?"

"No, assuredly; but what did he say?"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Nathalie, evidently troubled.

"Of Charles Marceau, of course."

"He said nothing; because, to tell you the truth, he knows nothing."

Rose stepped back, in some surprise.

"Does he still consider you as his affianced wife?" she quickly asked.

Nathalie hesitated; but she at length answered:

"No."

"But you contradict yourself, Nathalie."

"I do not, Rose. I had asked for time to reflect; he granted it; but though my resolve was fixed, my actual reply was not yet given, when we spoke together last night; therefore he knows nothing."

"And does any-one at the château know that you have left?"

"They must know it now."

"But you left by stealth, without explanation! Oh! Nathalie."

"How did I know I could stay here with you, Rose? Besides, I can write now."

She rose, brought forward writing materials, and an old mahogany desk, wrote a few lines, and was folding up her letter, when Rose quietly said:

"Let me see what you have written, Nathalie."

The young girl silently handed her the note.

"So," said Rose, after glancing over it, "you merely tell Madame Marceau that you are staying for a few days with me. Oh! Nathalie, why not say frankly, 'I leave, because I cannot marry your son.'"

"I shall tell her so in a few days," replied Nathalie, in a low tone.

"Tell her now."

"I will not, I will not, Rose," replied Nathalie, speaking calmly, but with a sudden change of look and tone that reminded her sister of the preceding evening.

"And why so?"

"I will not," again said Nathalie.

Rose saw it would be useless to remonstrate. She took the letter, folded it up, and said, quietly:

"I shall take it."

Nathalie looked confounded—almost alarmed.

"Do not, Rose, do not," she quickly exclaimed.

"I cannot send Désirée, my aunt would not allow it; but I can go myself," very calmly replied Rose, who now looked fully as determined as Nathalie to consult her own will.

No more was said; but as Rose, after going up to her own room. came down again, and stood in the dark passage, in the act of opening the street-door, the sound of a light step behind her made her look round. It was Nathalie; she was standing at the head of the staircase, with its gloom behind her, and her brown dress falling down to her feet: even in that dull light, which scarcely revealed the outlines of her figure, she looked anxious and pale.

"Rose," said she in a low tone, "do not see Madame Marceau; it is better not."

"Do you think so?" calmly said Rose.

"Yes, indeed, I do; pray see no one."

"Do not make yourself uneasy," quietly answered her sister, as she went out and closed the door.

An hour had elapsed, yet Rose returned not; at length Nathalie, who sat anxiously by the window, beheld her entering the narrow court. Her heart sank within her, and in spite of all her efforts to look and remain calm, a marble pallor overspread her features, as, after a few minutes, Rose entered the room. Neither spoke. Nathalie silently looked up at her sister, who did not seem to heed the glance. The face of Rose wore its usual expression, and she took up her work and sat down in her place in entire silence.

Nathalie rose, walked to the other end of the room, suddenly came back to her sister, and said in a low breathless tone,—

"Well, Rose?"

Rose looked up very calmly.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Have you nothing to tell me?"

"Little or nothing."

"Did you see Madame Marceau?"

"Yes, I saw her."

Nathalie's countenance fell.

"Who was with her?" she quickly asked.

"No one," laconically replied Rose.

"What did she say?" hesitatingly resumed Nathalie after a pause.

"She read your letter, and uttered a few smooth unmeaning phrases, no more."

"And that was all?" said Nathalie, seeming much relieved.

"No," gravely replied Rose, "that was not all. As I reached the gate her son overtook me; he had just left his mother, and seen your letter."

"Well, what did he want?" calmly asked Nathalie, as her sister paused and looked up into her face.

"I will repeat his own words.—'Pray tell Mademoiselle Montolieu,' said he quietly, 'that I am only too happy to wait for her reply, however long it may be deferred.' "

"He said that," exclaimed Nathalie, with something like scorn.

"Yes, Nathalie, he said that; but do not deceive yourself; if that man loved you once, he does not love you now."

Nathalie gave her sister a startled look.

"What do you mean?" she said in a faltering tone.

"That Monsieur Marceau does not love you."

"Then why show himself so submissive, so humble, Rose?" asked Nathalie in a low voice.

"I cannot tell; but soft as was his tone, humble as was his speech, there was still something sinister in his eye as he spoke and uttered your name."

"But why should he wish to marry me, if not for love?' urged Nathalie, who was very pale, though she spoke so calmly.

"Perchance for hatred," replied Rose; "I have heard of such things. Nay, for all I know, he may have many motives."

She ceased. Nathalie had grasped her arm, as if for support; she was deadly-pale, and her quivering lips told the intensity of her emotion.

"Rose," she said in a low tone, dropping her glance and commanding her agitation as she spoke, "we have had enough of this."

"Yes," sorrowfully answered Rose, laying down her work to look at her, "I think we have."

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CHAPTER XXIII.

A VERY graphic account might easily be given of the wrath of Madame Lavigne, on learning that Nathalie had come to stay for some time in her house; but as mere ill-temper has in itself nothing peculiarly attractive, it is sufficient to state, that the aunt of Rose was highly indignant with her niece, and declared Nathalie should not remain.

"You may have it so," calmly said Rose, "for this house is certainly your house; but if Nathalie leaves it, I leave it also."

The blind woman heard her with silent wonder. That quiet decided voice told her Rose meant what she said, and as she desired nothing less than the departure of her niece, she felt compelled to submit; but indemnified herself by indulging in double her usual amount of grumbling. She was the more vexed that Nathalie, though the cause of all this strife, said not a word to please or conciliate her. She listened to all her complaints and reproaches in unmoved silence, assisting Rose in her work, and never once raising her eyes from it. Thus the day passed.

At nine, Rose left her seat, folded up her work, and said:

"We must go to bed."

They proceeded up a steep staircase to the little room, occupied by Rose. It was meanly and scantily furnished; a narrow bed, a chair, a small deal table, and a crucifix, were all this nunlike cell contained. Rose laid down the light she held, saying:

"I am going to my aunt's room; I shall soon return, but do not wait for me."

She glided out of the room, and was gone.

Nathalie began to undress, but other thoughts came to her; she sat down on the chair, and buried her forehead in her hands. The whole house was silent, save in the next room, where she could hear, as a low indistinct sound, the ill-tempered scolding of Madame Lavigne, and the quiet replies of the patient Rose. But she heard without listening; the two voices came to her as in a dream.

"You are weeping," at length said a voice. It was Rose.

Nathalie looked up; she was pale, but her eyes were tearless.

"No, I am not weeping," was her brief reply, "why should I weep?"

Rose did not answer. She went up to the window, drew down the curtain, then came back again, and stopping before her sister, said briefly:

"You have a proud and haughty heart, Nathalie; know you not such pride is sinful? I have watched you all day long, not soliciting the confidence you would not grant; and I have seen you inflicting on yourself the most acute misery, in order to look indifferent and calm."

"I am calm," interrupted Nathalie, rising as she spoke.

"Calm!" echoed her sister, eyeing her fixedly: "why then are you so pale? why is your look so troubled, your smile so dreary? Oh! Nathalie! Nathalie! did you think to deceive me?"

Nathalie looked up; her brow, late so pale, became flushed, her lips trembled.

"What do you mean, Rose?" she asked.

"I mean that I know all: I mean that I know—"

"You know nothing," cried Nathalie, interrupting her, "it is not true; no one would believe you; ask me nothing, I will confess nothing; you know nothing, Rose."

Her sister did not reply, but she looked at her with a glance, as sad as it was penetrating.

"Oh! Rose! do not look at me so," exclaimed the young girl averting her flushed face, and clasping her trembling hands, "do not with that keen searching look. You are like Madame Marceau now; say something, do not look so silently."

"What shall I say?" gently asked Rose.

"No, no, say nothing," replied her sister; "be merciful, not a word, a hint, or rather a whisper, and do not look so; it tortures me."

She buried her face in her hands and sat down on the edge of the bed, her whole frame shaking with the intensity of her emotion. Rose eyed her with deep sorrow; her features had lost their habitual calmness; she walked up and down the room, with evident agitation; at length she stopped before her sister, sat down by her side, and drawing her towards her, said in a low and compassionate tone:

"Alas! poor child, woman's sorrows have fallen on you early, very early."

Nathalie tried to look calm, to feel calm; but she had struggled with her feelings too long, and laying her head on the shoulder of Rose, she wept long and bitterly. Her sister soothed her with a tenderness she had not anticipated. She spoke to her gently, without reproach or useless argument; compassionately as a mother might speak to a sorrowing child. She asked no questions, but her kind caresses did more than inquiries; at first Nathalie spoke only in broken confessions; but gradually she became more frank and unreserved: half confidence was not in her character; she should tell all or nothing. Rose heard her sadly, but without surprise.

"I knew it long ago," she said, "before you, perhaps; but what availed it? What warnings have ever warded off the love of youth? I saw he had taken on your imagination the dangerous hold no man ever takes in vain on the mind of woman—a hold the more dangerous and secure, that he did not seem to seek it. But I hoped time would show you that all this was folly; that his coldness or his pride, would end by repelling you."

"Oh! Rose," exclaimed Nathalie, in a low tone, "it was that pride charmed and undid me; that pride which never verges into haughtiness, which does not repel, yet seeks not to win, subdues irresistibly. It is a strange thing for a woman to feel that she may be fair and young in vain! strange—ay, and dangerous."

"But surely you knew from the first he was one it was hard, if not impossible, to win!"

"Rose, did you ever read the fairy tale of a proud princess, who could not love, unless where she was not loved, and whose haughty heart bled only until it broke with mingled pride and grief?"

"Oh! child, I understand it less and less: there are many imperfections in his character, and you never seemed blind to them!"

"Blind! no, for I was always seeking for them as eagerly as if I had been a secret enemy set to watch for and seek them out. Perilous search, which I in my folly thought so harmless! How little risk I should have run had he been perfect: how soon I should have wearied of seeing him always do that which was right, admired him of course, and thought of something else. Though he does not, it is true, do wrong, yet his impulses and feelings are not always what they should be: but then his judgment rules them with a sway of iron. I soon learned that he who looked so calm was not so; that he was a perpetual contradiction: proud, he yet forbears to wound the pride of others; passionate, he never utters an angry word. The language of worldly wisdom is ever on his lips, and his life is filled with traits of the most romantic generosity. But though I gradually discovered all this, I could never understand him thoroughly; for he is harsh, severe, and as implacable to others as he is to himself, which is saying no little. One cannot know him long, without feeling that there is a perpetual warfare carried on within him. Cold as he seems, he has to strive against himself to remain so. You feel it, and you watch anxiously, to see which of the two principles shall conquer in the coming contest: shall passion prevail, or shall will? Oh! Rose, he is a book to read on for ever, without wearying. You are lured on, you know not how, nor why; still baffled, yet not repelled, and there is the charm—there is the danger."

"But, child, he is so cold," gently said Rose; "he is incapable of love, for instance."

"No, Rose."

"No?"

"No, he loved years ago. It is a long story; she was his cousin, very beautiful and faithless; he proved harsh and pitiless. His aunt says she died of grief. Oh! why did his aunt and Madame de Jussac tell me so much? Why was he from that day linked in my mind with the most kindly feeling in humanity! Why could I no longer think him all harshness and severity? He had loved once; I could read how deeply, by the very sternness of his resentment. Had he loved since then? Would he ever love again? How was he when he loved?—how did he seem?—how did he feel? These thoughts haunted and troubled my heart long before I knew why. His aunt had also said no woman could love him; this made me wonder if it were true. Had she loved him?—if not, why die of grief? Had he loved her truly? I thought so; yet who could tell? Did that marble repose, which I read on his brow, dwell also in his heart? Was all as still there as it looked to the outward eye? Was he one of those iron men—for there are such—whom a being, pure as an angel, loving as a woman, fair as a lily, yet not too pure and fair to cherish; something peerless, and yet quite human—was he one of those whom such a being would have failed to win? in whose lives women act no part, but bloom and wither in a day, like brief summer flowers? I thought so sometimes; at others I doubted. I knew it was in that château of Sainville he had loved. The thought pursued me; the shadow of that love, which ended in bitterness and grief, was over that dwelling, and its old garden: it often saddened me, as I thought, for her sake. There was a bench near the river where he would sit, until the stars grew dim. Had he sat there with her on cool summer evenings long ago? There were flowers, in the green-house which he loved; was any thing of her memory connected with them? Had she tended those same flowers less pure, less lovely than herself; and did he love them still, for something of her sake? How had he felt, when he first returned to this home of his youth and earthly affection? Had he been drawn back there by the mysterious instinct that attracts us towards the spot that beheld our first joys and our first sorrows? Had a vision risen before him as he crossed that threshold, beautiful still, in spite of broken faith, of years elapsed, and of the dark shadow of an early grave? or had he beheld all again unmoved? Had time done its work, and effaced her memory from his heart, as well as from the old garden where I never found one lingering trace of her being,—where all vestige of her had passed away, like the mark of her light foot-prints from the earth? And then came the thought: 'I, too, am young; and, unless I have been much deceived, well nigh as fair as she once was: and this house, for some time at least, is my home. Must my fate be like hers? Have youth and beauty no better, no happier destiny? Is all over with a few brief years; and when the gates of death have closed upon us, are we to be forgotten, as she is now? Must the spots we most loved, which are filled with the glorious and fervent dreams of our youth, know us no more? and oh! far sadder thought, shall the hearts where we had made our inward home,—shall these, too, forget us, or remember us merely as the pale, scarcely earthly creations of a long-forgotten dream?' "

"Hush!" gently said Rose, "you are feverish, hush!"

"Rose, let me speak; I have been silent long; it will do me good. I am not ill, as you think. Never was life more keenly awake within me than it is now. I hear with acute distinctness, and see with dazzling vividness. Nor is the inward sense less wakeful. Thoughts crowd to me, and language comes—all clear as noonday light; let me speak."

"Then answer me this question," resumed Rose; "how could this deep interest in a stranger fail to enlighten you?"

Nathalie shook her head sadly.

"It did not," she replied; "because I was simple, credulous, and ignorant; I had no actual experience, and books had taught me nothing. How is it, Rose, that you always read in books of the love a woman receives, and so seldom of that which she feels? I had dreamed of those things as girls will dream; I had imagined myself beloved; I had not reflected that I would probably love in my turn. I had beheld a lover sighing at my feet; it never occurred to me that I might love in vain; because those dreams were all of vanity and not one of them came from the heart. I would have been on my guard with Charles Marceau, who loved me; but Monsieur de Sainville was so indifferent and so cold that I never dreamed of being on my guard with him. I exercised not the least influence over him, and he, without seeking it, ruled me completely. I secretly made him my judge. I sought to do that which he would approve, to avoid that which he might censure. I learned to read praise or blame in his look; and how often, when I was on the point of doing or saying some foolish thing, has that look checked and subdued me."

"But there was a time when he was indifferent to you," persisted Rose.

"Ay, a time that now seems vague and indistinct, like a dream."

"You disliked him very much at first."

Nathalie did not answer. She still sat on the edge of the bed, near her sister, one arm passed around the neck, and her head half reclining against the shoulder of Rose. Her eyelids drooped, a faint, rosy hue spread over her pale features, and her lips trembled with a half-formed smile; the smile of the girl who feels how much wiser she is in knowledge of the heart than the older woman.

"You disliked him at first," reiterated Rose.

"How do you know, Rose?" was the low reply.

"How! Why you told me so; besides you were always abusing him."

"And you defended him, Rose."

"Did you abuse him to hear him defended?" asked Rose, with a sudden suspicion. "Oh! Nathalie! I thought you frank, incapable of deceit!"

"Rose, be not angry. It was not you I wished to deceive, but myself. Are you a woman, and do you not understand the mysterious instinct and ceaseless desire to conceal some things for ever in the depths of the heart?"

Whatever Rose might think, she knew at least this was no time to chide. Nathalie resumed:

"It always seemed so hopeless, Rose, that it was not hard to deceive myself; because my heart could have no hope, I foolishly thought it could have no desires."

"And he was besides so high above you," added Rose.

"It was not that," exclaimed Nathalie, looking up with a sudden flush of pride. "I could have the heart to love a king, were he worthy of it."

"But what was it drew you towards him?"

"No one thing in particular, Rose. Love is not one, but a silent and secret gathering of many things unto the heart."

"Still there must have been something: what was it?"

"Power, perhaps; that art which he possesses of swaying whatever comes within his sphere; of making others lay themselves bare before him, whilst he himself remains silent, almost unmoved, and still keeping his own secret. Perchance it was this sort of mystery that attracted me It exercises a peculiar fascination on all; even his simple and artless aunt feels it; she has spoken of him to me repeatedly, as 'that person,' never daring to mention him more openly; never suspecting that I saw more in what she told me than she herself, good simple creature, could perceive. I sometimes think there was a conspiracy, not of man but of destiny, to draw me towards him, and, whether I would or not, to compel me to love. His aunt, his sister, Madame de Jussac, and even that foolish Amanda, could not speak without dropping vague hints, which made me look on him as a living enigma,—guessed by many, read by none. When I came here, you always spoke of him first; your aunt taunted me with his name,—his name which I could never hear or utter without a secret thrill, I will not say of joy, but of something far deeper, between pleasure and pain. Thus it came to pass, that I thought of him much at first, constantly afterwards, and that I ceased to wonder at a thought so continuous. Alas! it was an old story,—girlhood's folly ending in woman's love. I now see that the life I led in that old château was dangerously dull: what had I to think of or to do, save to dream my youth away? Oh! let blame ever fall lightly on her who feels outward life so cold and so cheerless, that she must needs make her heart and its visionary world her home. Are we denied reality, and shall we not even dream? What heart of stone first framed that law? What heart, more senseless still, first obeyed it? I said that the life I led there was dangerously dull; outwardly it was, but never was my inward life more full, more active, more vivid. In those dreams, which wove a wonderful romance from the slightest threads of reality, I often beheld one unlike any I had seen before, serious, cold, and impenetrable; I gave him no name, not even in my thoughts, but I placed him in imaginary perils, and strove to guess how he would brave and conjure them by the mere force of his will. I saw him oppressed, but unconquered; ruined, scorned, but haughty and defiant still. And then, when fate and misfortune had done their worst, I placed a woman on his path; I did not make her fair, or seek to ask myself what was her aspect, but I put faith, love, and reverence for him in her heart; and she sat by the place near which he was to pass, not seeking or alluring, but patient, modest, and womanlike. Oh, Rose! how is it that as I speak, that day-dream thrills through my heart? How is it that I see her there watching his coming, and thinking 'will he let me be something to him; will he let me soothe him in his sorrow, and walk through life by his side, his patient, faithful shadow?' Vain hope! He draws near as proud, as unsubdued as ever; wrapped in his own thoughts, he sees her not, and passes on. He sees her not, though she has sat there for many a day, patiently waiting his expected coming! Rose, I have dreamed that dream over and over, and wondered why I was charmed by its bitterness. Sometimes it changed; sometimes he saw her, paused, and spoke:—'My poor child,' he wondering said, 'what are you doing here? many have passed by; for whom are you waiting thus alone when the night is closing in?' Seeing that she made no reply, he guessed the truth, and remonstrated with her with gentle kindness. 'What! waiting for me! Oh, girl! what blindness has seized you? You wish to console me, and how do you know that I have any sorrow to soothe? Look at me well: do I seem one of those who need a woman's ministering love? Love? I have no faith in it! it is a folly, a delusion, a dream; and if you are young and beautiful, what is it to me! What do I care for loveliness, and for the freshness of early years? What even for the unsought love which lives in your heart? Do I not know that youth and beauty fade? that love, like all which is born, must die? Be reasonable; think of some other,—forget me. And if she, unhappy girl, persists in her folly, if she vows that love, that her love, is no dream,—that it will live through life and endure beyond the grave,—he only smiles with the sadness a truer knowledge gives, and bidding her a kind and cold farewell, he leaves her there alone with her despairing grief. And if all this was a dream, that sorrow, Rose, was at least real, for a day came when, wilfully blind as I was, I yet confessed to myself that he was that man, and I, alas! that desolate, unloved girl for whom I wept.

"Oh! Rose, you do not, cannot know the strange feeling it is to love one, who not only cannot love you, but who refuses to believe in love. Sometimes I said to myself: 'he is not so skeptical as he seems; yes, I can read lingering regret in all his doubting; yes, if he could, he would gladly return to the divine fountain we drink of in youth; yes, he would love and live again. That he believes in God and honor I know well; and that there is much of noble feeling in his soul, and of high goodness in his heart, I know better still. Could that weak, faithless woman win all the love he had to bestow? All? And her image rose before me, and I asked myself if she had been so very fair? Alas! she had. How often have I gazed at her portrait, and felt jealous of that beauty which had passed away from earth, in all its dazzling freshness, to haunt him still beyond the grave, and made every other woman look pale and dim in his sight! For who could tell whether death had not, with strange power, restored his love to her, even as it had given her that gift of eternal youth and loveliness which time would have so ruthlessly faded? Other women might be fair; what matter? their beauty would fade; hers endured. Oh! there are strange contradictions in the human heart! He had cast her from him; but this did not prove he did not love her. Might she not have become to him as the memory of Eden became to sinful and sorrowing Eve?—a green oasis lost for ever, but clothed with an immortal beauty that made all the perishable gardens of earth seem as dreary deserts!

"Oh! Rose, do you think me mad, or do you understand me? Can you guess that the thoughts, the doubts, which torture love are also those which feed it? Had I been sure of any thing, hope might have perished at once; vanity or pride might have cured me. But I knew nothing. I was tossed on a sea of uncertainty, beyond which, on a distant shore, smiled a hope, oh! how fair, that beckoned and lured me on through every doubt and danger. I resisted; I called pride to my aid; I said I would not love one who cared not for me; but again I became weak, and declaring it was too late, I closed my eyes and surrendered myself to the stream. There was a strange and perilous pleasure in feeling myself carried down by that rapid current, without knowing whether it would lead me to the blest haven of rest, or wreck me for ever on the rocky shore of despair. And thus deluded by the syren Hope, and far more by my own heart, still blind to the severe truth before me, I gave myself up to the most delirious dream my youth had yet known. If the delirium was guilty, bitter has been the awakening. Bitter was the day on which I felt, 'beautiful I may be, but not for him; I can charm other looks, many perchance, but not his.' Oh! Rose, there lies the depth of my despair, there is the ever-renewing source of my bitter sorrow, for if I were plain, I might have fed my heart with thoughts of how I could have won him had God made me fair; but now I feel that youth and beauty have both been mine in vain. Oh! why is this? Why have I not the nameless grace which is not beauty. but possesses a power far beyond,—the charm that would have subdued his proud heart, and, whether he would or not, have made it mine? Why could his least word make me blush and tremble, whilst he remained unmoved though I was near? Oh! worthless is the loveliness unseen by the eye of those we love. Oh! sister, sister, pity me!"

She wept, and for awhile her half-stifled sobs broke on the silence of the narrow room; but she soon became hushed again; it was Rose who spoke next.

"Alas!" said she, in a sorrowful tone, "I have turned over another page of the old story of woman's wasted love and youth. I knew it, but still it is hard to watch a being daily growing up in purity and grace, and to know from the first, what the end will be."

She seemed to address her own thoughts, and not Nathalie. There was a pause.

"Did you then know what the end would be?" at length asked her sister.

"I did, child. The beginning of the story may vary; the end is still the same: disappointment."

"But did you know how it would end in this case?"

"Any one could have known it. You such a child, he so grave and severe; any one could have known it."

"Who can tell? who knows?" murmured Nathalie, in a low tone.

"What!" incredulously exclaimed Rose.

"Who knows!" repeated her sister.

"Oh! child! do not deceive yourself," gently urged Rose, "do not. Believe me, I have seen him little, but I can tell you this: A man like him will never love one so young."

Nathalie raised her head from the shoulder of Rose, and shook it gently, whilst her lips parted with a smile of sadness, half blending with triumph.

"You cannot tell, Rose," she said, "you cannot tell; you have not sat in the same room with him, evening after evening. You have not learned to divine the hidden sense of his coldest tones, and to read the meaning of his calmest glances. You have not blushed over a page your eye saw, but did not read because you felt that another's look was reading far more surely every passing thought and feeling on your brow. You have not rebelled at length against this inquisition, and looked up to brave the smile, kind, yet conscious, that still seemed to say: 'No maiden's heart is a mystery to me.'"

"What! does he love you then!" interrupted Rose.

"Alas! I do not, I dare not say so," despondingly replied her sister, "to like and love are vastly different. I think he liked me, a liking that might perhaps have ripened into love, but he is severe, and I was weighed, found wanting, and rejected, not in word, but in deed."

"But awhile ago you spoke of his utter indifference."

"Rose, the heart has two creeds: Despair and hope, often equally wide of truth. It believes either, in that which it most dreads, or in that which it passionately desires to be true. Sometimes I say to myself: 'I am mad: he care for me! Oh folly!' and at other times hope whispers to my heart: 'Why not?' and she bids me remember gentle words, kind smiles, and lingering looks, that all rush back to me with a strange bewildering meaning. I feel those remembrances are too intoxicating to be true, and yet too vivid to be merely the dreams of a longing heart. More I might have known, but you will wonder perhaps when I tell you, I would not. I thought of him constantly, and shunned his presence. I have hidden in the garden when I knew him to be there; I have lingered in the gloom of the staircase lest I should meet him. Daring I may be, but I am not of those who court a man's notice, and go half way to meet the love they most longed for. Like the imaginary maiden of my dream, I may sit by the road-side and wait in silent hope, but though I should die of grief, I will not move one step to meet or utter one word to arrest him. Sometimes I thought he was almost vexed; at other times I fancied this reserve, which was not shyness, piqued, but did not displease him."

"Did he seek to meet you?" asked Rose.

"No. He was my host, and never forgot it; but when we did meet he seemed to me a little nettled, and perhaps offended at the opportunities I seized to shorten our meetings. It was not prudery, far less mistrust; but I had a mortal fear of betraying myself in a way I should ever repent. Generous in some things he may be, but not in all. I have seen in him a strange desire to hide as carefully what he feels as to discover what is felt by others. If he ever loves, the woman must lay her heart bare before him, and be content with glimpses of his own. Now to this I would not submit; if he saw my folly, he should also see that I was neither forward nor unwomanly. I kept aloof from him; a plan his sister favored. Rose, Madame Marceau read my heart, its hopes, its wishes, but she never read its pride, or she had not fancied I needed watching. So foreign was such a thought to me, that at the time I never suspected I was suspected. Thus passed the winter; I saw him daily, never alone; but the heart makes its own solitude. When his sister slept, or feigned to sleep, when we both sat near the hearth, reading silently, was it with him as with me, and did his thoughts wander from the unread page into that visionary world which had become my second life? Alas! to this hour I cannot tell. Was he not a serious man, too grave for the thoughts that might haunt a dreaming girl? Oh! Rose, I fear that when women are deceived in men, it is often —I do not say always—because they judge of them as of themselves, and attribute to them feelings and phantasies that belong to the restless heart of woman alone; but as I said, thus passed the winter. Spring came; and one morning, when my hopes were as pure and fresh as that lovely spring time, Madame Marceau told me her brother had taken a resolve, a sort of vow, never to marry; his aunt confirmed it. A chil*l* fell on my heart, yet, strange to say, I doubted. I asked myself 'do men keep those vows which women so often break? Who knows whether he, proud and cold as he looks, may not yet be glad to break his?' Little time had I to think of this, for the very next day Charles Marceau returned. I had a presentiment that he would be fatal to me, and I resolved to leave at once. I met Monsieur de Sainville by chance in the library. I could scarcely repeat what he said, and yet at the time I thought, 'do men speak thus to a woman for whom they care not?' In spite of my reserve I let him see how deep was my faith in him, and he seemed pleased to be thus trusted, and exacted and obtained a promise implying still deeper trust. Oh! that I had kept to this faith! Rose, how shall I tell you the rest? You know me; you know that I am credulous and easily deceived by art—alas! another knows it too—but you do not know that woman. She asked me to marry her son; he came in to tell us his uncle had consented, and this latter consent stung me so deeply that I forgot to ask myself how that proud woman could have thought of me for her daughter, unless through the fear of a danger that would have been the realization of all my dreams. Then, when I was thus disturbed, did she for the first time let me see that she understood me.

"How can I tell you the look of her searching eyes, when she said, with a smile, that no woman could deceive another. My heart lay, indeed, bare before her, to handle and pierce; and what quivering nerve did she fail to touch, in order to win me over to her purpose? Rose, do you think there is aught so cruel as one woman can be to another woman? She spoke vaguely in hints that stung me one by one: 'it was not mere consent, it was approbation her brother had given; he had long desired this marriage; they had talked it over; but he had urged delay, because he saw my weakness, and pitied it; but I need not fear,—he was a man of honor.' Most artfully did she blend that which was false with that which I knew to be true. In an unhappy moment, she wrung from me a bitter doubt of his honor; but the next instant my faith had returned. I remembered his words, his looks; they were not those which reluctant pity yields. I understood his reserve; it was not coldness, it was delicacy that had kept him silent. Would I have had him become the rival of his own nephew,—of his dying sister's son?

"He came in; and before his calm look and plain speech, her falsehood stood revealed. A thrill of happiness went through my whole frame, when he denied having given more than a passive consent to the projected marriage; when he declared I was the last woman he would have chosen for his nephew's wife. Oh! Rose, for one moment the cup of happiness was offered to my lip, and I drank eagerly of its rapturous flow; but how soon did her cruel hand snatch it from me. Though by so doing, she confirmed the proof of her treachery, she repeated every word I had heedlessly uttered. He remained indifferent until she came to that slur on his honor. My heart failed me; his look, his mien, all I knew of him, told me my doom was sealed for ever. Perhaps you think it was grief I felt then; ay, keen, poignant grief, but strangely mixed with a proud and bitter resentment. If he loved. he was too pitiless; if he did not love, what right had he to show himself so haughty and exacting? He had never wooed me, why did he now treat me like one rejected? This thought was like death,—oh! more bitter by far. What is death?—the pang of a moment: wounded love and pride bleed daily. And my pride was roused within me; I felt in a mood to do myself some mortal injury, in order to inflict on him one keen, sharp sorrow;—to marry his nephew, be miserable for my whole existence, and add to the story of his life another regret, and, perchance, a second and surer vow. I thought I saw where I could wound him, and I resolved to utter in his presence the words that should doom me, to see how he would feel; whether he would start, or color, or turn pale, or betray, ay, even faintly, but I could have seen it, that those words affected him.

"Madame Marceau spoke of me as 'her daughter.' 'Then she has consented?' he involuntarily exclaimed, and fastened his look on me to read the reply in mine eyes. I bade my brow be clear, my look be steady, my whole aspect to bespeak calmness. I seemed not startled like one who has heard an untruth, but as composed as one who has heard a fact. Oh! Rose, how I triumphed for one moment! He started, and either the changeful light deceived me, or he turned pale. I triumphed; yes, though I had resolved to seal my own fate—though my heart was breaking, I triumphed: for I thought that his heart, though so proud and haughty was yet touched to the quick, and, in its turn, had felt the bitter sting of love scorned and rejected."

The eyes of Nathalie kindled; her cheeks were flushed, her lips compressed, as if the passion of that moment lived once more within her as she spoke.

"Well?" said Rose, interested. The countenance of her sister fell.

"Alas!" she replied, with deep sadness, "he had not startled, trembled, or turned pale; he had only changed his attitude—it was only the doubtful light of the obscured room that deceived me, as it fell on his features. In vain I looked, in vain I tried to detect again on his features that passing emotion: he had petrified himself. Now, if I chose, was the moment of my expected vengeance. Oh! Rose, what I felt then! I bowed my head, and half closed my eyes like one who crosses a precipice, and who will not look on either side, because to look is to perish irretrievably. I would not grant him the triumph of hearing me once more refuse Charles; I had no longer the cruel courage of dooming myself to misery: I chose a medium course, and asked for time to reflect. Perhaps, in the secret folly of my heart, I thought to give him time to repent. Folly, indeed: that same day he left for a whole fortnight, without seeking to see me. I was in the *salon* with his sister; and pitiless as are all of that race, she bade me listen to the receding sound of his horse's hoofs. I did listen, and that sound, which was as the knell of my departed hopes, still seems to ring in my ear. Had that man ever cared for me? I knew not then, I know not now; but this I know—that my heart failed me, and my last hope perished from that hour. For three days I was calm enough. Charles Marceau was away; to become his wife did not seem so dreadful a fate. But on the fourth day he returned; and then I knew it was not indifference I felt for him, but something almost akin to hatred. How I detested his dark, handsome face, and his voice of unbroken smoothness. I believe he saw it, for he tormented me to his heart's content; his look never left me: there was ever some double meaning in his speech, and yet, with all this, there was also a strange sort of love, of desire to please, of involuntary homage, which irritated me more than all. It was a day such as I have never spent. 'Wilt thou marry that man?' ceasingly said a voice within me; 'wilt thou chain thyself for life to one whom thou loathest?' In vain I strove not to hear or to heed; to call in pride to quell that tumult in my soul, I could neither silence the cry of conscience, nor win peace. Towards evening I left the château, and went to the abbey-church. I thought that there I should be more free to think and decide, that some holy influence would subdue the strife within me. I knelt where you saw me, but besought in vain for courage to accomplish what I still persisted in considering my destiny: in vain I called wounded pride to my aid, the holy silence of that place still reproved me. I felt indignant at my own weakness. I resolved to take a vow of marrying the man I hated. for the sake of punishing, perhaps, the man I loved."

"Did you take that vow?" asked Rose.

"No; I dared not. But I made myself an omen by which, come what would, I resolved to abide. Oh, Rose! I am no fatalist, but to feel deeply, is to deliver up heart and soul to every passing superstition: I said to myself, he is gone for a whole fortnight, it is impossible he should return, and because it is impossible, I will make that the condition of my vow. If he does not return, and I know that he will not, I will agree to-morrow to marry his nephew; if he does come back, it is a sign that I must not persist; that come what will, Charles Marceau must be nought to me. Alas! it is thus the heart ever makes its own fatality."

Rose eyed her sister with mournful severity.

"Is it thus you understand prayer?" she said. Oh! Nathalie, prayer is not what you deem, mere traffic with heaven. It is communion with the infinite and the divine; it is not a clinging to earth, but a raising of the spirit towards all eternal things."

"Rose," sorrowfully replied her sister, "you may feel it thus, but let those who pray for their sorrow to be removed hold another creed. The erring child can surely ask for its burden of misery to be lightened, and have we not a Father full of tenderness? Tell me not that the weak prayer of the sinner is not heard as well as the pure aspiration of the just. There is in the despair of a breaking heart, though ever so guilty, a voice that will rise from earth and pierce the very depths of heaven! How do you know that, as I knelt there, my soul darkened by earthly shadows, this secret sorrow did not yet meet with mercy? What passed between us I need not tell you. I know now that all you said of a guilty love was meant as a solemn warning. You are pitiless, Rose; can you imagine the torture you inflicted upon me? You said he might marry, and I asked myself, 'why not?' I strove to look as if calculating the chance of a lost inheritance, but I had far other thoughts, far other feelings. I was imagining how he would look and speak with the woman he might love—for I felt that he would love her—and I was calling that woman blessed, and already envying her with all the might and passion of a jealous heart. And then, as if my cup of bitterness were not yet brimful, came the torturing thought that I might have been that woman; it was but a chance, but had I not cast it from me, it might have been mine. I betrayed nothing of what I felt; even to myself I would not have acknowledged it. We parted. I returned to the château; but when I reached the gate, I paused; I could not cross that threshold over which—as Dante over the entrance of the awful city—I seemed to see written the fatal fiat, 'leave all hope behind.'

"I walked on; the evening was clear and mild, and the road, save where some belated peasant returned from his labor, lonely. The moon was high; on my right were narrow fields, skirted with a wood, which rose dark and indistinct against the pale blue sky; and on my left, a plain, sloping down to the valley, in which the river flowed silently. In the deepest shade I could see the low cottages, that seemed to be stepping into the water, with their whitewashed walls and moss-grown roofs; and my heart smote me as I thought, 'Oh! that one of these had been my home, and not the proud château of Sainville.' The cool breeze, the quietness of that evening time, soothed, however, the secret fever of my soul. I continued to walk on; I wished to fatigue my body. I succeeded, and was at length compelled to pause and rest. There is a group of aspens that grows by the roadside; I sat down on a mound of earth near it. The breeze rose, and stirred the branches above me, and, with the low, rustling sound, came back those remembrances, against which I was striving ceaselessly, and striving still in vain. How often had that sound greeted my ear in Sainville, by that same quiet stream! I remembered one evening, beautiful and calm like this, when I stood with him and his aunt by the river side. He was speaking to her; I had remained a few paces behind them: he suddenly turned to address me, and his look, his tone, the gliding stream, the rustling aspen-tree, the quiet landscape beyond,—all rushed back to me in one moment. Oh! that the past were not the past, I thought; that the dreary present were yet an unknown future smiling before me. I bowed my head, not to weep, but I felt faint, heart-sick and weary. A distant sound aroused me; a horseman was coming along the road, at a slow pace. I raised my head, but without daring to look round.

The sound drew nearer; it was he; I saw him, for the light of the moon fell full upon his face, as he rode slowly by, within a few paces of me. I was not sitting in the shade; yet his look did not once seek me; it was fixed on the horizon before him, and there it remained, and fell not on her who, her pride all subdued, waited his half-expected greeting with a beating heart.

"Here was the sign I had asked for, and here, oh, strange are the presentiments of the heart! was also the fulfilment of my old day-dream. I sitting by the road-side and he passing on. I looked after him as he receded in the distance, and I thought, it has come to this; he cares so little for me, that when we meet by chance, he either does not recognize me, or if he does, feigns not to see me. What folly once made me think, that because I had a heart I had also the privilege of feeling? Why has God given woman a heart to love? Why must she who loves most truly pine away in silence, whilst man, to whom love is but a pastime, alone can speak? He is deeply offended; I have lost, I will not say his affection, which I never had, but his friendship and esteem, yet under pain of the grossest misconstructions I must not seek to recover either. Why, since those laws of opinion are so stringent, why cannot some things be said without words? why is there no language from heart to heart, as rapid, silent, and as truthful as the thought that springs within us? Why, above all, am I so miserable, when so very little happiness would have done for me! I was neither proud nor ambitious. One winter evening as I was with his aunt, he came and joined us; he sat by her side, I, on my low stool, was thus in some sort at the feet of both. He spoke of his travels, of many a distant scene, of foreign lands which he had visited. I listened in rapt and silent attention, for I felt in my heart as if I could have been content to pass thus through life, sitting at his feet and listening to his teaching. But as I remembered my love's humility, pride was once more roused within me, and I almost hated him in my heart.

"I returned to the château, and went up to my room to prepare for the morrow's departure. Childish as you will think it, I would not have dared to disobey that sign of my own choosing. My room was dark, but a light fell on the floor; that light I knew it well; it came from a window facing mine. How often, vain and credulous girl, had I watched it, standing hidden in the shade, smiling at the folly of my dreams, and yet still dreaming on. But now I would not; that time was over; I thought of it with secret sorrow,—my hand was on the curtain to shut out even that glimpse: what arrested it, what kept me, in spite of anger and struggling pride, rooted to the spot? The old spell was on me. A thin curtain fell between him and the window, but I could see his figure passing to and fro; he was very restless; his step was uneven; once he stopped short in the centre of the room, and remained there motionless full five minutes; then he sat down, but he could not stay, and soon rose once more. Never before had I seen him thus. A joy in which blended a sense of acute pain came over me. He was unhappy, restless at least. Had I any part in this? He had not retired to rest when I left the window. What conclusions I drew from his seeming agitation! what visions I welcomed! In vain had I suffered, in vain been taught by sorrow, oh, dreams, dreams of the heart! are ye then eternal? I did not sleep until morning, yet it was early when I woke. In the clear daylight I derided the dreams I had been indulging, and again called pride to my aid. I was soon dressed and ready; I would see no one: I had a horror of all explanations—I wished, if possible, he should think I was ignorant of his return. I left; it was easy: a servant met me near the gate, and seemed surprised to see me out at this early hour, but even he did not speak—not a voice was raised, not a word was spoken to detain me in that house, to me so fatal. I felt bitter, unhappy, and slighted, and yet by a strange contradiction, I felt also that I would not, even if I could, have torn out from the book of my destiny the pages on which fate had written the story of my love. Oh! Rose, I am very weak after all; my resentment is dying fast away: the harshness seems to vanish, and all the kindness to return. Unhappy as it has made me, I see I cannot repent this feeling; it has changed my being; it has made me better—it has given me life which I knew not till then. I was a child before, I am a woman now. Be it so; sorrow shall purify me still further. I will give myself a higher motive of action than I have had till now—I will suffer, and love on, though without a ray of hope."

"And you will make him the idol of your heart, and give him the place that should belong to God alone?" said Rose, with mournful severity.

"You are right," sadly replied Nathalie, after a brief silence; "but, oh! Rose, since I may not forget, what can I do?"

She spoke so submissively, and yet, so despairingly, that her sister had not the heart to chide. She pressed her to her bosom, and merely said :

" Pray."

CHAPTER XXIV.

There was nothing querulous or complaining in the character of Nathalie She was not patient : she might often revolt against her fate, but she disdained to lament it. Her nature was too fiery and too vehement ever to verge into the weakness of repining.

She had poured out her heart to Rose, because it was then full even to overflowing ; the confidence had relieved her, but having once told her sister all with the most unreserved freedom, she thought this sufficient, and did not so much as dream of again renewing the subject. Rose was surprised ; she had not expected this. She watched her sister anxiously. Nathalie was certainly pale and did not seem in good health ; but her features were more serious than sad. When she rose in the morning, she had the worn look of one who has spent a sleepless night ; yet her eyes never seemed dimmed by weeping, nor did her pale cheeks bear any trace of tears. This faculty of subduing the external signs of sorrow alarmed Rose. It revealed a strength of character she had not suspected, but it also made her fear that what she had considered as a mere girlish passion, was one of those deeper feelings whose ill-repressed fever wastes the pure freshness of youth and poisons the source of a whole existence. On the third day she asked Nathalie when she intended to give Madame Marceau her final answer.

" When the ten days I asked for are elapsed," briefly replied Nathalie, evidently not disposed to continue the conversation on this subject.

This proud and obstinate silence ended by alarming Rose. She resolved to break through it.

" Nathalie," said she to her one morning, " that pride of yours will kill you. You suffer, but are too haughty to complain."

" Be easy," returned Nathalie, with a gesture not free from disdain, " and fear not for my health. Take my word for it, Rose, it is only the mentally and physically weak some sorrows kill. Those who have strength to feel, have strength to endure to suffer, and live on."

"But why be so proud?" urged Rose.

"I am not proud," calmly replied her sister, "but I am no love-sick maiden. I am simply an unloved woman who has no right to complain, who will endure silently, wrap courage like a mantle around her, and say, 'none shall see that I sorrow.'"

"But I see it," returned Rose, "you have lifted the veil from your heart and cannot drop it again; and if you had never raised that veil, I should not the less have seen through it. Look at that book which, to please me, you have promised to read; it is still turned down at the same page; look at that task which you took in hand before yesterday; it is not half done; yet you are of an active disposition, and were fond of reading once."

"Yes, once, Rose."

"Why not now?"

"Because books, ay even the most excellent, could not now take me out of myself or be my spirit's home. I have reached that time of life when dreams end and reality opens; when the mind grows weary of always imagining, and wishes to live for truth. I know you think me too fond of day-dreams and romances: you would not think so could you know how I long, how I thirst for truth and reality."

She spoke in a feverish tone, and pressed her hand to her forehead. Rose bent over her, and laid her hand on Nathalie's shoulder.

"You long for truth," said she, "turn towards divine truths."

There was a brief silence. Nathalie at length looked up into her sister's face, now calmly bending over her; the young girl's eyes were tearless, but deeply mournful.

"Rose," she very sadly replied, "I know what you mean, even as you knew what I meant. But the truth for which I long is not, alas, the truth towards which you bid me turn. What will you think of me when I tell you that my soul, my heart, my very flesh cleave to this earth; that, do what I will, I cannot tear them away. I know the divine Master to whose feet you would lead me; I have heard him saying 'Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' I have struggled against my yearning heart and its unavailing wishes; I have raised my soul in prayer, and besought for aid throughout the silent night, and my burden has not been taken from me, and I have never won repose."

"Is there no comfort in Christian resignation: in saying this is the will of God?"

Rose spoke with serious gentleness; but Nathalie smiled somewhat bitterly.

"There are different natures," she said, at length; "some are submissive, like yours, Rose; but mine is not, and has never been. When did I bear sorrow patiently? I am young, impulsive, and energetic; life now flows in me in its fullest and strongest tide, and that is why I suffer keenly. If I were weak or passive, I should either die or forget; the latter most probably: but being as I am, I cannot do either. I must live, remember, and suffer still; for I am of those rebellious spirits who think they were made for happiness."

"Do you doubt the goodness of God, the justice of his providence?" gravely asked Rose.

"No, that would be impious and foolish; but to acknowledge that God is good, that his providence is just, does not remove the bitterness of my sorrow. Religion and reason both tell me 'suffer patiently;' but there is a voice in my heart which revolts against this. which cries out incessantly: 'Why, oh! why must I suffer?'"

"Oh! Nathalie," very sorrowfully said her sister; "you have dreamed too much, you have read too many of those books which waste for ever the divine freshness of the heart."

Nathalie shook her head, and smiled.

"How strangely you talk," she replied, "one might think love had been invented by novels and novelists. Would it not exist without them? Is it not something more than a human creation? Oh, Rose! that you, in many things so wise, should yet not see that the heart is, and ever must be, its own most impassioned and most dangerous romance—that love is no weakness, but a most divine thing!"

"Idolater! Idolater!" sadly murmured Rose.

"I am no idolater: love is divine."

"But, Nathalie, is not passion, which is but the fever of love, too often confounded with love itself; and what is the purest affection but the dream of youth's brief years?"

"Then what was the heart given us for, Rose?"

"Not for an idol. Shall we for ever hear of the heart and hear so little of the soul? It is beautiful to see two human beings loving one another with truth and tenderness; but when I behold idolaters kneeling to clay as fragile as their own, I turn away my glance with sorrow, and wish them a purer worship."

"But you would make life too cold," replied Nathalie. "I have suffered from a mind too restless, from a heart too eager in its longings, yet I would not change my sorrows for so placid and passionless an existence as that you would have us lead."

"And is there then no deep feeling, save one?" asked Rose, whilst a faint tinge of color rose to her pale cheek; "is there no such feeling as duty, no such passion as the passion of its accomplishment?"

"Oh, Rose!" said Nathalie, looking up into her sister's face, "you are perfect; but to be as you are, bearing all, feeling nothing, would be a living death to me; I can suffer, if it needs must be so, but at least let me live. Believe me, we are not calm; calmness is not human; life is a running stream, forced repose breeds stagnation. Hide it as we will, we carry within us the germ of restless longings; a fever of the heart which nothing can satiate or appease. Vague desires for some undefined good haunt even our happiest moments. If there are some who have never felt this, over whose joy a shade of sadness has never come, even in its very fulness; who have endured sorrow without the bitterness of one moment's despair, may I never meet them; they are not human,—they have no heart."

She spoke with passionate eagerness.

"Oh, child!" sorrowfully said her sister, "what a fever you would make of life; life is a running stream indeed, but one that bears us to the divine repose of the grave."

"The repose of the grave!" echoed Nathalie; "do you then believe in that unnatural calm, which is all we actually know of death? I do not, Rose, I do not. No, I do not think that life's fitful story ends with six feet of earth, and that beneath that cold stone, the heart lies still. There are, there must be feelings and passions that conquer even death, and snatch its triumph from the grave. Who has come back to tell us how much exactly it is that dies, how much that lives? The soul, you will say! I ask who told you that the heart would perish? It cannot be merely the principle of life that survives; it must be life itself, Rose, life exalted, purified if you will; but life with the same feelings and burning thoughts that formed a part of its being here below."

"And you thus feed yourself with thoughts of the eternity of your feelings," sorrowfully replied Rose; "and you think that your love, that perishable dream, endures for ever. Believe me—and yet no, you will not believe me—it lasts but a day."

"You say this to comfort me," said Nathalie, looking up; "strange comfort! Do not tell me that I shall ever be cured, do not weaken my faith in the truth of what I feel. I know sorrow is painful, but to think that our sorrow, though now so deep, shall pass away, that a time will come when we shall smile at the past, may be true, but it is too bitter. Are we so weak, that our griefs are of as frail and perishable a nature as our being? I will not believe it; I will have faith in the eternity of sorrow, that I may have faith in the eternity of its source; I will believe that what loves and suffers in me is not the perishable clay, but the immortal spirit."

"Idolater, idolater," again murmured Rose, "do you think I do not see how all your thoughts are with him?"

The head of Nathalie drooped, and her cheeks flushed.

"You see much, Rose," she replied, in a low tone, "but not all; you do not, cannot know the pictures that haunt me. When I close my eyes thus, with my brow leaning on my hand, visions are before me. I see myself sitting at noon in the lime-tree avenue; the shade is so thick that no ray of sun can pierce it; the whole avenue is filled with a cool, green light, which makes the sunny landscape beyond look like one long line of golden and dazzling light passing behind the trunks of the lime-trees Why, will you say, do I remember this? because as I sit there reading he has passed by; he has not stopped to speak; I have not raised my eyes from the book, yet the memory of that moment lives in me still. And it is so with all in which he ever had a part. I remember every word of our first interview; every incident of that first evening in the drawing-room, when the regular fall of his footsteps on the floor blended with the sound of the wind and rain without, and I secretly wondered what sort of a man he was. I never knew until now what memory really is; for it is thus with me all day long, and all through the watches of the night. I am ever haunted by pictures of the past, by looks, smiles, and kind words, that shall never return for me. I see fireside scenes at twilight time, ere the lamp is lit, and when the ruddy light falls on the hearth; garden scenes, with all the warmth, the brightness of summer's noon-day, have come back; and so strong and vivid is the impression thus received, that when I look up, when I see this cold room, so chill and dreary, with nothing but the monotonous ticking of the clock to break on its silence, I often ask myself is this the dream? was that the reality?"

Rose made no reply; the conversation dropped, and was not renewed.

On the eve of that tenth day which was to be that of Nathalie's final answer, Amanda very unexpectedly called. Madame Marceau, she said, was much worse, and wished to see mademoiselle immediately. Indeed, the *femme-de-chambre* hinted pretty clearly that her mistress, who now kept her room, was well nigh in a dying condition. Nathalie felt infinitely shocked, and did not hesitate to comply with the request. At first she was somewhat disturbed by the thought of meeting either Monsieur de Sainville or his nephew, but on their way to the *chateau*, Amanda informed her that both were away.

"What! whilst Madame Marceau is so ill?" exclaimed Nathalie, with much surprise.

"Yes, is it not extraordinary!" exclaimed Amanda, with a vivacity which showed that her own curiosity was roused, "but it was madame's wish, quite her wish; this morning she sent Monsieur Charles away, and this afternoon as I was in her room, she did not give monsieur any peace until he had promised to go, and, in spite of the storm which is threatening, I saw him ride away as I came out."

Nathalie made no reply; she began to understand why Madame Marceau had sent away her son and her brother, and this made her feel anxious respecting the result of their interview. If she suppressed all resentment of the past, she could not, however, forget that she who now sent for her, had been the cause of all her woe. Absorbed by these reflections, she silently proceeded up the road leading from the little town to the château. It was a gloomy evening, with a dark threatening sky lowering over the whole of the surrounding landscape. Low thunder muttered in the distance; not a breath of air stirred the leaves or branches of the trees which shaded the road on either side; all nature had that breathless stillness which forebodes the coming of the storm.

Immediately on arriving, Nathalie was ushered into the bed-room of Madame Marceau. It was almost dark; the curtains carefully excluded every lingering ray of daylight; a pale wax-light burned on a low table at the further end of the room. At first all seemed gloom to Nathalie's sight, but as her eye became accustomed to the doubtful light of the apartment, she gradually discerned from behind the sombre damask curtains of the bed, the pale face of Madame Marceau. It was not a week since she had left, yet was she struck with the ghastly change a few days had already made. "She is indeed dying," thought Nathalie, as she hesitatingly came forward.

"Oh! it is you!" feverishly exclaimed Madame Marceau, attempting to raise herself up, but failing in the effort: the nurse had to help her. She accepted her aid with evident impatience, and without thanks, briefly said, "leave us."

They remained alone. Nathalie had not yet spoken. The sight of Madame Marceau recalled too vividly all that had passed. At she sat there at the foot of the bed, she felt that she gazed on the same pitiless face which had sealed her destiny. To resent the ill worked by one now so near the end of all earthly good or evil seemed cruel; but the wound still bled inwardly, and not to feel it was not in her power.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said the lady, after a brief silence, "may I know your final decision; will you or will you not marry my son?"

"No, madame, I will not," replied Nathalie, in a low and deliberate tone.

"You will not," bitterly echoed Madame Marceau; "and it required ten days to come to this decision!"

Nathalie did not answer. Her conscience told her that her conduct had not been quite justifiable, and she neither sought nor wished to excuse it.

"Well!" sharply exclaimed the lady, "what else have you to say?"

"Nothing else, madame."

"So you think to insult us with impunity; presumptuous girl?"

A frown had gathered over her brow; but Nathalie met her look steadily.

"To decline an affection I never sought is not insult," she very firmly replied.

"Oh! Nathalie, Nathalie!" bitterly exclaimed the lady, "insult would be nothing; it is wrong, actual wrong, that you have worked to me and mine. You have been the wreck of all my hopes for the future; all. I had bent my mind on a rich and brilliant marriage for Charles; he would have agreed, but for his absurd passion for you."

"Since that absurd passion is hopeless, Monsieur Marceau will now enter into your views," coldly said Nathalie.

"Yes," replied the lady, with increased bitterness, "he will; but what woman will be flattered at the prospect of marrying a man you have refused?"

Nathalie colored, but she suppressed her indignant anger and merely said :—

"This fear is one you need not have, madame; no one shall know from me that I ever had the opportunity of giving any such refusal."

"But it will be suspected and discovered ultimately. It will be reported that you spent a whole winter here, that you left when my son came back, and left of your own accord! At first it will only be whispered, then rumored, and known at length all through Sainville, all over the province; such news travels fast."

"It is my intention to leave both Sainville and Normandy speedily," Nathalie calmly replied; "when I am gone, the matter will soon be forgotten."

"Leave!" joyfully exclaimed Madame Marceau; "but no," she added with sudden doubt, "you do not mean it sincerely."

"And why not, madame?" gravely asked Nathalie.

"Then leave now, if you are indeed sincere," urged Madame Marceau, with a fixed glance.

"I shall do so when means and a fit opportunity offer," was the calm reply.

"I will give you the means and afford you the opportunity," eagerly said Madame Marceau.

"You, madame?" exclaimed Nathalie, with much surprise.

"Yes," she replied, in a brief and feverish tone; "I had already thought of this: I foresaw your refusal: I also foresaw that Sainville and Normandy would become disagreeable to you: I settled it all beforehand. The sooner you leave the better, of course; do not look so astonished! I tell you, you can leave this very evening if you like; that is to say, if you are sincere."

She paused, out of breath at the rapidity with which she had spoken, but her glittering eyes remained fixed on the astonished countenance of the young girl.

"And if I were to leave," said Nathalie, after a pause, "where should I go to?'

"To the south; you are from the south: you must like the south: it is much more beautiful than this cold Normandy of ours. Besides, I have a friend in the south, a lady to whom I have already written about you, who wants a companion, who will love you, and whom you cannot fail to like."

Seeing how far Madame Marceau's plans had extended, Nathalie now thought fit to check this.

"I thank you, madame, for your kindness and foresight," she said, very coldly, "but I cannot agree to this."

Madame Marceau bit her lip.

"Why so?" she asked.

"Because I will never again enter any family as companion."

"Oh! there is no family there; my friend has neither brother nor son;" said Madame Marceau, now speaking with unrestrained bitterness.

Nathalie colored deeply, but forbore to reply.

"Well, do you consent or decline?" resumed the sick lady.

"I decline."

Well as she habitually controlled the workings of her features, Madame Marceau could not now conceal the bitter disappointment she experienced.

"Then you were not sincere," she exclaimed, "and you only spoke of leaving, in order to get all this out of me."

"I had no such intention," replied Nathalie, a little indignantly, "and if I spoke of leaving, it is because it is my firm, irrevocable intention to leave."

The last words were uttered with a sorrowful decision, that forbade Madame Marceau to doubt their truth. She seemed to reflect, then said suddenly:—

"I believe you are sincere, and therefore I feel you cannot decline what I am going to propose: namely, to leave Sainville, settle where you like, and receive in exchange for this compliance a yearly settlement from me. Mind, I propose this for my own advantage, not for yours: have no scruples of delicacy, but comply from a sense of honor, of reparation due for the mischief you have involuntarily caused. If you comply, leave Sainville, and hold no communication with it, reveal your abode to none, or at least bind your sister—she is religious—to a promise of secresy. There is yet hope that this deplorable affair may either remain unknown or at least be speedily forgotten."

She spoke with feverish earnestness; Nathalie heard her with increasing astonishment. After a brief silence, during which the burning look of the sick woman never once left her, she replied:—

"Madame, this cannot be!"

"You refuse? You actually refuse?" indignantly exclaimed the lady.

"Yes, madame, I indeed refuse."

"And why so? pray, why so?"

"Because I cannot accept——"

"Have I not told you it was to oblige me?"

"Madame, I deeply regret it; but it is impossible!"

"You refuse?"

"I am extremely sorry——"

"Do you or do you not accept?" Her voice rose, her features became more dark and angry.

"I do not," calmly answered Nathalie.

"But you shall not refuse," passionately cried the lady. "I say you shall not; I say you must go, and no one shall know where you go. I am not rich, but I will settle on you all I have irrevocably, if you will only pledge yourself to go."

Nathalie could not repress a feeling of pity.

"Madame," she gently said, "I cannot, indeed, comply with your request; yet I promise you to leave Sainville speedily, and I conjure you to think of other things in this solemn moment."

"So you think I am dying, do you?" replied Madame Marceau, with a bitter laugh; "and you are kind enough to tell me so! But do you think," she added, with a withering look, "that I cannot guess the secret of your obstinate resistance? I have watched you day by day; watched you when you suspected it least. Foolish girl! did you think to deceive a woman, and that woman a mother? Yes, I know you," she continued, as Nathalie's sudden pallor showed her that she had struck home, "I know your hopes and ambitious desires; but never, save as my son's wife, shall you become mistress of Sainville."

"And never thus," exclaimed Nathalie, suddenly roused by this taunt; "never thus, madame!"

"You love my brother! deny it if you can, if you dare! you love him!"

A sudden blush overspread Nathalie's face, but rising from her seat, she said with a firm look:

"I feel no shame; I deny nothing."

"Forward girl!" bitterly continued Madame Marceau, "you confess it; you confess that you love a man who might be your father, who cares not, who has never cared for you!"

"Nay, who has loved me; who, in spite of himself, loves me still," exclaimed Nathalie, carried away by an irresistible impulse, and speaking with all the passionate fervor of the heart's ardent faith.

Madame Marceau looked at her like one stupefied.

"You say so, you dare to say so," she at length observed; "my brother love you—my brother marry you? Well. I shall ask him."

"Madame, you cannot mean it?" cried Nathalie, with sudden terror.

"I beg your pardon; I do mean it."

"No, you cannot be so cruel, so treacherous," exclaimed Nathalie, with trembling agitation.

"Comply with my request and I am silent," suddenly rejoined the lady.

"Never," replied Nathalie, with much energy, "never;—say, repeat what you will, I care not; I stand strong and secure in the sense of my own purity. I spoke in a moment of folly, but I said the truth: you know it; he knows it better still. If he judges me ill, God forgive him; my conscience acquits me."

The head of Madame Marceau sank back on her pillow; she was very pale; her lips quivered; her hands trembled. Nathalie, much alarmed, rang the bell; the nurse entered, gave a rapid glance to the patient, then turned to Nathalie.

"What have you been doing to her?" she exclaimed, almost angrily.

"Nothing," replied Nathalie, in a faltering tone.

The woman no longer heeded her: she was seeking to restore Madame Marceau, who had fainted away; in a few minutes she succeeded. Nathalie, guessing her aspect would do the patient little good, had retired to a dark and distant part of the room.

"I feel better now," said Madame Marceau, calmly enough, in reply to an inquiry of the nurse; "but what step is that on the staircase?" she uneasily added. The door opened as she spoke, and Monsieur de Sainville entered.

Nathalie had half-prepared herself for this moment. She had thought that if she met Monsieur de Sainville by the bedside of his dying sister, she could see him with calmness and unconcern, and now she found that it was not so, that what the brain wills the heart may not always obey, that her cheek deepened in color, and that her whole frame trembled as though mortality did not exist, and threw not its shadow over the longest and most enduring love.

Without seeing her, he advanced towards his sister. In spite of her weakness, Madame Marceau half raised herself up to exclaim:

"Armand, Armand! is that you? Why did you come back?"

"I thought it best with a storm threatening, and you so unwell."

Madame Marceau sank back on her pillow.

"It is a fatality," she muttered, with something like despair; "do what I will, it still ends thus, and fools say there is no destiny."

"What is the matter, Rosalie?" kindly asked her brother; "why does my return trouble you thus?"

She made no reply; she was gradually resuming her self-possession, and turning towards the obscure spot of the room where Nathalie still stood, she calmly said:

"Petite, I will not detain you any longer; there is a storm threatening: your poor sister would feel uneasy. Good bye."

For one moment Monsieur de Sainville looked discomposed, as his glance suddenly fell on Nathalie, who came forward without looking at him, but he soon checked the momentary feeling, and quietly observed:

"The storm has come, Rosalie, and it was lest you should feel uneasy that I came up."

A lightning flash quickly followed by a loud peal of thunder, confirmed the assertion.

Madame Marceau glanced from her brother, who had taken a seat at the foot of her bed, to Nathalie, who stood near her head. Their looks were averted: were their hearts asunder?

"It is a fatality!" she muttered again.

She said no more, she looked pale, faint, and exhausted. Nathalie remained in the same attitude for a few minutes, then left the room. On the landing she met the doctor, who entered the sick room while she opened the door of the *salon*. A small lamp burned on the table; but no one was there; yet a seat and a book showed it had recently been occupied; by Monsieur de Sainville, most probably. Nathalie turned away, troubled at heart, and walked to one of the windows; she drew back the curtain and looked with unquailing glance on the storm, now at the height of its wrath The sky was of a deadly darkness, ever and anon traversed by lurid lightning: the avenue, the road, the landscape beyond appeared illumed for a second; then suddenly vanished into deeper gloom, whilst the full thunder seemed to shake the house to its very foundations.

Half an hour had thus elapsed when Amanda came in She was weeping and sank down in a seat.

"Good God!" cried Nathalie, turning very pale, "what is it?"

"My dear mistress!" exclaimed Amanda.

"Well!" breathlessly cried the young girl.

"Alas! the doctor scarcely hopes she will outlive this dreadful night; I thought I would come and tell mademoiselle, whose deep sensibility I know so well. I must now go and prepare Madame la Chanoinesse, who will soon be my only mistress,—unless, indeed, monsieur or his nephew should marry; the former is much the more likely of the two, for Monsieur Charles is rather young. As to monsieur having taken any resolve or vow, I think, for my part, that those vows were made to be broken, and that though gentlemen may be women-haters, yet when it comes to the point, they generally find there is no decent living without women; and indeed since every thing is for the best——"

A peal of thunder interrupted what she was going to add. She trembled and turned pale.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "is not this awful?"

"I do not mind the storm," said Nathalie, "but I remember that Madame de Sainville does; you had better go to her."

Amanda, who thought a rickety turret much less secure than a drawing-room, inclosed in a mass of solid masonry, very reluctantly complied.

Nathalie once more remained alone. She was deeply agitated. Her old fear of the storm had vanished. A power mightier far than that of lightning or tempest was now beneath that roof; the storm without would pass away and leave a serener sky: the power within would not depart until its task were done, not until the light which now burned so feebly were quenched for ever. The most impressive sermons have been preached on the vanity of this world, and all it contains, but what sermon is so powerful as the thought, presence, or sight of death? All that Rose had ever urged to her in her mournful wisdom recurred to the memory of the young girl. What was love, when life was so brief? Strange as it seemed, and as it must ever seem when the tide of life flows full within us, she too would die. She remembered the words she had heard not so long ago. "Fresh and fair as you are now, you too must share the fate of earth's most glorious and most lovely things; you too must pass away, and fade, and die." But alas! even now as then, the sense of the words seemed to fall heavily on her ear, whilst the look, the tone, with which they had been uttered, lived once more within her, and sent their impassioned thrill through her beating heart.

Anxious to banish these thoughts, she looked out once more. The storm had ceased; an occasional flash of pale lightning revealed the dark depths of the sky, and the low muttering thunder was still heard in the distance, like a conquered foe sullenly retiring. Heavy rain had succeeded to the storm; it poured down in torrents with a low rushing sound, that seemed to Nathalie like the distant voice of that dark flood, whose waves must bear us all to the last journey's unknown bourne.

A strange sense of awe came over her. Sorrow she could not feel, but a solemn hush fell on her feelings: she felt that death was in the house. She left the window and sat in the arm-chair, the same where, on many a winter evening, she had indulged in those wild reveries which were not of the imagination alone, but of the far wilder, and more dangerous romance of the heart. Thus she remained for several hours. At eleven the door opened and the doctor entered; he softly came forward, shook his head, took a seat, folded his hands, sighed, and looked attentively at Nathalie. He was a short, corpulent little man, with a good-humored and even jocund face, ill adapted to express gravity or sorrow. Nathalie, unable to understand the meaning of his presence, looked at him with surprise and alarm.

"Sir," she said at length.

"Yes," he interrupted; "very sad, very; but not unexpected, which is a great source of consolation. I foretold it ten days ago."

Nathalie looked at him again; he shook his head and closed his eyes. She turned pale, and felt so faint, that she was compelled to cling to the arm of her chair for support. It was all over then: she had expected this, but not so speedily. It seemed most strange that the being with whom she had spoken but a few hours back, should now be nothing—so far as this world was concerned. Was this, then, the result of all the scheming which to the end had filled that worldly heart?

The doctor, perceiving that the young girl looked more shocked than grieved, resumed:—

"There is another great source of consolation: the unhappy lady remained wholly unconscious of her approaching fate."

"Wholly unconscious!" thought Nathalie, with something like contempt, for, apart from all religious feeling, though she was by no means void of it, she thought it cowardly thus to die.

And yet this is the end which the world considers fortunate! Strange good fortune, which consists in being cheated into death. There must truly be great, nay, awful degradation abroad, when this cowardly death is envied: there must be a singular unconsciousness of the rights of the soul, of the duties of life, of the dignity that pertains to human beings.

"Yes, a great source of consolation," resumed the doctor; "but, as I said, I predicted it; from the night I was called up suddenly, I knew, and told Monsieur de Sainville how it would be."

Nathalie looked up; she remembered Monsieur de Sainville's sadness in the garden at night: this, then, explained it.

"I conclude that so orderly a lady left all her affairs in a proper state," continued the doctor, whom few things annoyed so much as a patient dying with affairs unsettled. "It is certainly a great source of consolation that her brother was here to see that all was right; and another source of consolation, that her son was away, since his feelings were spared a painful and certainly unnecessary shock."

Oh, sorrow! chastener and purifier of the heart, you too have rights unacknowledged and wrongfully withheld; for do we not escape from you as from a foe we dare not brave, nor even attempt to subdue?

A good deal more the doctor said, but he at length perceived that Nathalie had ceased to heed him. He retired; again she remained alone, until Amanda came to ask if she would not, since it was much too late to think of returning home, take some rest in her own room. When the young girl inquired after the Canoness, she was told that Aunt Radegonde knew nothing as yet, which of course rendered it more advisable that they should not meet for the present.

Nathalie went up to her turret-chamber; how little she had thought on leaving it, ever to sleep there again. She remembered Madame Marceau's exclamation: "it is a fatality," and in the passing superstition of her heart, she asked herself if a mysterious destiny did not indeed draw her back to the abode where real life had first dawned before her.

No light came from the opposite turret; yet through all the awe and solemnity of the hour, the young girl could not forget that she slept, or more properly rested, beneath the same roof with Madame Marceau's brother.

CHAPTER XXV.

The death of her niece greatly affected the poor Canoness. As she knew nothing of Nathalie's motives or feelings, she greatly wondered and complained when the young girl left her on the following day, and was extremely urgent in beseeching her to return after the funeral. With this request Nathalie would certainly not have complied, but for the fact that both Monsieur de Sainville and his nephew were away for a fortnight; such being the case, she consented.

On the evening of the day appointed for her return to Madame Lavigne's, Rose, after leaving her aunt, and entering her own room, found Nathalie sitting there alone.

"I did not know you were come back," she said.

Nathalie did not reply, but looked up slowly: something in her whole aspect struck Rose so much, that she suddenly stopped short, in order to look at her more attentively. The young girl seemed to have been preparing to undress, for her unbraided hair fell in thick waves around her; but she had not proceeded further in her task, and she now sat back in her chair, with her hands clasped on her knees; the neglected wick of the tallow candle burning on the table near her, showed that she had long been there. She looked up at her sister with an abstracted gaze.

"Yes, I am come back," she slowly replied, and again relapsed into her reverie.

Rose gave her a wondering look, but busied herself about the room. Nathalie did not move; five minutes elapsed; Rose looked at her sister repeatedly, but without succeeding in meeting her gaze, which was fastened on the floor. Stopping short before her, she at length said, in her low, grave voice: "Child, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Nathalie, and she rose quickly.

But laying her hand on the shoulder of her sister, Rose calmly continued: "You cannot deceive me, what is it?"

She eyed her fixedly, as they stood side by side, in the centre of the narrow room. The eyelids of Nathalie drooped, but her lips parted,—not with a smile, for it was scarcely so definite,—but with an expression that conveyed so much; that told so plainly the pure joy of a pure and happy heart, that Rose felt confirmed.

" Are you glad, and will you not tell me why?" she asked, with something like reproach.

Nathalie turned quickly towards her, and by an instinctive impulse pressed her lips to the hand that rested on her shoulder, but she did not speak. After waiting for a while, Rose made a motion to withdraw; her sister detained her.

" I am glad, Rose," she said in a low and hesitating tone, ' because I think, indeed, I know, that he has not ceased to esteem me."

She looked up to see how Rose would receive this; her sister was looking at her somewhat sadly.

" Poor child!" said she, in a pitying tone, " is it because that harsh, proud man has not been quite so harsh, quite so proud, that when I came in, you looked so happy?"

She sighed as she spoke. Nathalie averted her face, but even through the falling hair that partly veiled her cheek, Rose could see that she blushed deeply. She bent down and fixed her calm, penetrating glance so that it met the young girl's eyes, but though Nathalie's look was frank, it could not always be easily fathomed, and now it completely baffled the scrutiny of Rose.

The young girl probably felt this, for, without shrinking from her sister's glance, she smiled a little archly.

" Have you any objection to tell me what has happened since we met?" asked Rose.

" No, Rose, I have not;" yet she spoke hesitatingly.

Her sister seated herself on the edge of the bed, signed her to take a place near her, and assumed a listening attitude.

" It is a long story," said Nathalie.

" Never mind."

" Listen! there is the abbey clock striking ten; it is late."

" Not too late to hear you."

" But your aunt will be angry."

" We can talk low."

She waited; but Nathalie did not speak. Rose perceived it would be necessary to question.

" Did you see Monsieur de Sainville?" she resumed.

" Yes, I saw him; both he and his nephew returned to-day. I believe they had not long been in the house, and I was preparing to go, when Amanda came to ask me if I would object meeting them in the library. I concluded that Charles Marceau, being ignorant of my definite reply, wished to hear it; but why his uncle should have any thing to do with this, vexed and surprised me. Yet not seeming to wish to avoid the interview, I complied. They were both in the library—both in deep mourning, which made them look strange. They rose to receive me. Monsieur de Sainville did not sit down again. Charles obsequiously drew a chair for me. I sat down. I felt very faint and heartsick. My resolve was taken; but explanations are only favorable to the calm and the self-possessed; taught by the past, I feared. There was a pause. Monsieur de Sainville was the first to speak; he addressed me in his coldest and gravest tone, and apologized for his presence.

"'An express request of my sister on the last evening of her life,' said he,—'a request with which I have promised to comply, but into the nature of which it is needless for me to enter, renders it advisable that I should assist at this explanation between you and my nephew, so that no possible doubt of its results shall remain on my mind. I trust you will be kind enough to take my word for this, and to believe that a sense of duty, and not my own choice, has induced me to overcome my personal reluctance in this matter.'

"'Allow me to observe, sir,' blandly remarked Charles, 'that your presence is a renewed testimony of your former sanction, and therefore highly welcome. May I hope that Mademoiselle Montolieu participates in the same feeling?'

"If it was his intention to put me out of temper from the very beginning, Charles Marceau certainly succeeded. Irritated at the tone he took, I abruptly requested to be favored with the knowledge of his precise object in soliciting this interview.

"He seemed slightly embarrassed.

"'I must trust to your candor,' he at length replied, 'not to misconstrue me: but I believe you will agree with me that the recent death of my dear mother renders delay both advisable and becoming.'

"'Delay! What delay?' I exclaimed, in alarm.

"'I know,' he resumed, without answering, 'that there are objections to it; but I think it is a mark of respect we both owe to her memory.'

"'Will you be good enough, sir,' I said, trembling from head to foot as I spoke, 'to tell me what you mean?'

"His eyes were bent upon the floor; his whole mien was embarrassed; looking up at length he replied very gravely:

"'I feel that I am in a most difficult position, since the point I am obliged to urge is one likely to prejudice me in your opinion; and yet allow me to say that I have little fear but that reflection will convince you a proper regard for the memory of the dead does not imply indifference for the living.'

"He spoke with great composure, and met my look very steadily; a moment I felt myself bewildered and asked myself under what dream I labored, but I soon recovered.

"'I exact no explanations,' I warmly exclaimed; 'What do you mean by that strange language? Do you or do you not imply that there has been a contract between us, for the fulfilment of which contract you ask delay? Or is this a mere delusion of my senses?'

"'I understand your incredulity,' he said, in a penitent tone, 'but pray do not misinterpret my motives. With regard to the delay, my feelings——'

"'Good heavens!' I interrupted, losing all patience, 'who cares about you or your feelings? The question is, has there or has there not been a contract, bond, promise?—call it what you will?'

"'You doubt my word, my honor, my fulfilment of a sacred promise,' he answered, looking at me with grave reproof. 'Nay, you do not know me. Here, in the presence of my respected uncle, I renew that promise. You surely will not be skeptical after this?'

"I saw he would not explain or speak to the point; that I must myself do so. This was no time to hesitate. Commanding my temper as well as I could, I replied:

"'Sir, wilfully or not—that God alone knows—you most certainly misunderstand me. I claim not a promise you never gave; I object not to what you are pleased to call the delay of its fulfilment. An union between us, has, indeed, been contemplated; but I have never agreed to it; and I may now add that it shall never take place.'

"'And can resentment carry you thus far!' exclaimed he in a low and gentle tone.

"I am sure I turned pale; this calm, smooth persistency alarmed me.

"'I have no resentment,' I replied; he shook his head with gentle denial; 'but I beg to repeat most distinctly, that there is not and never has been any engagement between us.'

"'If resentment is not, indeed, your motive,' he said, very seriously, 'allow me to say this is a strange way of breaking a voluntary engagement, and one which I should most certainly have been the last person to press unduly upon you.'

"I felt something like terror; he was growing more and more composed in his falsehood; entering, I suppose, into the spirit of the part which, heaven knows for what purpose, he was acting.

"'But there is no engagement between us!' I indignantly exclaimed.

"'You say it is not resentment?' he calmly pursued, 'what then is it?'

"I remained silent.

"'Difference of fortune and station?' he inquired, with the smile I had learned to read, and which now seemed destined to remind me how little in my heart I had respected that social barrier.

"I did not reply.

"'Or a want of mutual sympathies?' he continued with his smooth irony.

"I rose—for I would bear no more—and turned towards him, burning with powerless anger. 'Sir!' I said, 'I repeat once more, that the engagement to which you allude has never existed. If you choose to persist in asserting this, I must retire: it is not in my power to give you honor and truth.'

"His look kindled, but only for a moment.

"'Before you retire. Mademoiselle Montolieu,' said Monsieur de Sainville, interfering for the first time, 'may I request to know, so that there need be no further doubt or misapprehension, whether you absolutely decline to marry my nephew?'

"Charles Marceau checked the reply I was going to utter, by observing in his smoothest tones; 'Before Mademoiselle Montolieu pronounces this definite answer, concerning the nature of which I do not think, sir, you feel much doubt, allow me to remark, in the spirit of common fairness, that she really has not done herself justice. She can give for breaking her engagement a motive much more valid than the motives I suggested. A motive indeed which justifies her to herself, and above all to me.'

"I had already vaguely suspected that Charles Marceau, like his mother, knew the truth. I felt, I saw it now. Our looks met; his glance was dark, full of vindictive triumph; I neither moved nor spoke, but a sense of sudden faintness came over me. I know not whether he changed his mind or whether this was but a plan to torment me, but after a pause he continued:

"'Mademoiselle Montolieu's motive is one that would justify every other lady in her case—caprice.'

"I felt in my heart Monsieur de Sainville was not one whom such mere trifling of words could deceive; he, however, merely said, turning towards me:

"'May I solicit your reply?'

"Oh! how difficult it had now become to reply; I looked at Charles to see what I had to hope or fear from him; but never had his features been more perfectly impenetrable to my gaze. There was a security in his calmness that alarmed me. A host of tumultuous thoughts crowded to my mind. I had no faith in the generosity or honor of Charles Marceau. Wounded as he was in his vanity and pride, might he not taunt me with my fatal love even in the presence of his uncle? Would I or rather could I deny it? All this passed within me with the rapidity of thought. I did not answer; I felt hot and flushed; I turned towards the glass door near which I was standing; I looked out on the garden, but saw nothing; my brow was throbbing violently, the room was silent and hushed, they were waiting for my reply. I felt I must speak. I half-turned round; Charles Marceau was standing near me.

"'The room is close,' said he in his soft low voice, 'I fear you feel unwell; you want air.'

"He opened the glass door. We now both stood in its deep embrasure; the curtain by accident or design had fallen so as to screen us partly from view; the room is large; Monsieur de Sainville was standing at the further extremity, he could see us but imperfectly, and words spoken in a low tone would not I know reach his ear. In a second my resolve was taken. I turned towards Charles Marceau, determined to know the worst.

"'I do not understand you,' said I, briefly.

"'Perhaps not,' he replied, with a cold smile.

"'I do not think that, in your heart, you wish to marry me.'

"He said nothing. I continued: 'I spare you, by taking on myself all the blame.'

"'And by placing me in the enviable position of a rejected suitor; you are too good,' he answered, with much bitterness.

"I began to understand his conduct; but I continued: Answer frankly, if you can; do you, or do you not, wish for this marriage?'

"'I do not,' he deliberately replied.

"'Then what do you want?'

"He eyed me fixedly, but with a look that told me nothing

"'Act as you like,' he at length said.

"'And if I were to consent?'

"'I understand the condescension, but might not, perhaps, value it now so much as formerly.'

"'You mean, it would be your turn to reject?'

"He bowed politely.

"'How will you act, if I persist in declining?'

"He assumed a look of surprise.

"'Really, Mademoiselle,' said he, blandly, 'I protest against this question; it implies a doubt of your entire freedom. If you choose to reject me, I beg, I entreat you will do so.'

"His voice, his tone, were almost frank, but in his eye I read the menace, 'Dare to do it.'

"'I understand,' said I, bitterly.

"'Yes,' he quietly replied, 'I think we understand one another.'

"I knew what he meant, and indignantly motioned him to leave me. He glided away, apparently unmoved. Assuming a calmness I did not feel, I turned round, and once more approached the table near which I had previously been sitting. Monsieur de Sainville stood exactly in the same attitude; his look fixed, his arms folded: he slightly turned towards me as I hesitatingly began:

"'Sir, I think,' but here I paused. Pity me, Rose; I had resolved to declare my rejection of Charles Marceau most unequivocally, but as I came to do it I remembered his implied menace, and my heart failed me. What I felt was no sin, but I shrank with poignant shame from hearing it revealed; and, good heavens! revealed by his lips. Instead of the refusal I had intended, I faltered out, as a medium course, 'I think, sir, I may leave it to Monsieur Marceau to reply.'

"I could not help looking up. They both stood before me. A gleam of triumph shone over Charles Marceau's dark features; he eyed me from head to foot, and his exulting look seemed to say. 'So, proud girl, you are humbled at length.' I was humbled; and, alas! I felt it far too deeply, not to avoid the look of mingled sorrow and surprise Monsieur de Sainville quickly cast upon me.

"'Mademoiselle,' said Charles, bowing with a courtesy which only added to, but did not for one moment veil, the conscious triumph he did not so much as care to subdue, 'I shall know how to repay the generous confidence you have placed in me. Allow me, therefore, sir,' he added, addressing his uncle, 'to inform you that happy as I should have been to become ——'

"'Stop!' exclaimed his uncle, in a voice which, though low, commanded obedience; 'it is only fair, before you proceed, to ask Mademoiselle Montolieu whether her ambiguous reply meant that she was ready to be accepted or refused, at your will, that she was willing to be your rejected bride or your wife?'

"He frowned, and spoke sternly. I seemed to awaken from a dream on the edge of a precipice.

"'No, no!' I cried, with sudden desperation, 'I did not mean that; I meant that Monsieur Marceau knew my firm resolve never to be aught to him; a resolve I would sooner not have repeated, but by which, come what will, I abide.'

"'You abide by it!' he exclaimed, biting his nether lip, and turning pale with repressed anger.

"'I abide by it.' I stood near the table, leaning on it with one hand, trembling from head to foot, but prepared for the worst; not to deny, but to endure. I soon perceived, however, that I knew him not, and that the words I feared would never pass his lips.

"'Be it so,' he coldly said; 'though the manner in which this has been effected is little calculated to please; the result is, to me, highly satisfactory. I suppose we now stand mutually free, mutually released from a bond which ought never to have been contracted, which we should have both detested in our hearts, but which a sense of honor would never have allowed me to break first.'

"'Sir!' I exclaimed, much irritated, 'must I again repeat that there never has been a bond between us.'

"He smiled——a smile which was of the lips alone, in which the eyes had no part, but he said nothing, as if a sense of delicacy forbad him to contradict me.

"'And I think,' severely said his uncle, 'that this recrimination is most unbecoming.'

"'Recrimination! sir,' echoed Charles, with apparent surprise, 'I protest I never honored or esteemed Mademoiselle Montolieu so much as I do now, for her frank and open rejection of me; never.'

"He spoke too emphatically not to mean more than he said.

"'Enough,' impatiently said Monsieur de Sainville, who did not seem to relish more than I did the turn the conversation was taking; 'I suppose all this is over now.'

"'Yes, sir, quite over,' replied his nephew, 'and allow me to observe, that though Mademoiselle Montolieu's rejection of me might seem to have been dictated by levity, I do not by any means insinuate that it was. Far from it; I am perfectly satisfied with her conduct, which I understand and appreciate.'

"I was turning away; I stopped short as he concluded, and confronted him with glowing cheek and kindling look.

"'But I do not understand you, sir,' said I; whilst my voice, in spite of all I could do, trembled.

"He looked down and smiled; both look and smile said plainly: Of course, denial is the usual formality.

"'Be it so,' he politely replied, 'I am quite willing to let the matter rest; be it so.'

"Alas! what could I say; burning and angry tears rose to my eyes, but I did not speak. Monsieur de Sainville, who was pacing the room up and down with mingled impatience and abstraction, now turned towards the spot where his nephew stood, and, walking up to him, briefly asked:

"'What do you mean?'

"I thought even then that had I been Charles Marceau, I should not have liked to meet that angry look; but he answered carelessly,

"'Nothing, sir.'

"'I ask you again what you mean?'

"This time he spoke sternly. Charles looked up.

"'Excuse me, sir,' said he, with a haughty smile, 'but willing as I might be to comply, there is much that Mademoiselle Montolieu would object to hear so indiscreetly mentioned; that confidence which exists between two persons cannot always be extended to a third.'

"I was stung, exasperated, roused to passion. You would have borne it all with angel meekness, Rose, but either I am ill-tempered, or destined to be ever provoked, for I confess that I felt desperately angry.

"'There has been no confidence,' I cried, indignantly, 'and I have nothing to fear from what you may say.'

"He gave me any thing but a friendly look, but controlling himself, he replied, with an assumption of gentlemanly candor, "'You are quite right; you have nothing to fear from me; for be assured that nothing shall induce me to utter a word that might wound or offend you; I shall be silent; ay, silent as the grave.'

"Rose, would it not have provoked a saint? But I said nothing. I felt my utter helplessness; I was only passionate; he was calm and artful. But I was neither alone nor undefended.

"'Since you persist in throwing out insinuations against Mademoiselle Montolieu,' said Monsieur de Sainville, 'I must also persist in requesting to know your meaning?'

"'I throw out no insinuations against her,' coldly answered Charles; 'delicacy and pride forbid me to speak more openly. I challenge her, in justice to me, to declare that I am justified in feeling gratified and relieved at her rejection.'

"'I ask you once more, what you mean?' said Monsieur de Sainville, without giving me time to reply.

"'There are bounds even to your authority, sir,' answered Charles, elated, I suppose, at the advantage I gave him by my silence.

"'Good heavens!' angrily cried his uncle, 'do you not understand that I speak not here as one having authority, as uncle or guardian, but as man to man?'

"'Then, as man to man,' replied his nephew, with equal anger, 'I refuse to answer; and as man to man, I ask what right you have to question me thus? What is it to you if Mademoiselle Montolieu breaks her engagement to me, and if I think her justified in so doing?'

"'There never was, there never has been any engagement between us,' I exclaimed, indignant at his persisting in that untruth.

He turned round, dark and threatening.

"'You need not disclaim it so indignantly,' he said with his most evil look, 'for you may as well know this engagement would never have led to a marriage you dreaded and I did not envy.'

"I did not answer; Monsieur de Sainville came to the spot where I stood; he did not look at me, but kept his glance steadily fixed on his nephew.

"'You have asked,' he said, with a seriousness free from anger, 'why I interfere between you and this young girl, and had she, indeed, ever stood to you in the relation of future wife, nothing should now induce me to interfere; but besides her own emphatic assertions, I have the express declaration of your late mother—I know, in short, that she is not and has never been under any engagement to you.'

"'Admitting this for the sake of argument,' coldly said Charles, 'I am at a loss to conceive the reason of this interference.'

"'She has been my guest,' replied Monsieur de Sainville with unmoved gravity; 'it is my duty to protect her from slights and unsupported accusations.'

"'And this, sir, is your only reason?' coldly said Charles.

"'By no means,' calmly answered his uncle. 'You seem to wish to know more; you are welcome to the knowledge: I intend asking her to become my wife. This, I suppose, explains sufficiently the interest I take in her fair name.'

"He spoke in his coldest tone. I neither moved nor spoke; I felt like one in a dream; Monsieur de Sainville's face was turned from me, but I confronted Charles Marceau. He had turned deadly pale: anger and shame struggled on his features; never had I seen him so like his mother as he looked then. For awhile he remained confounded, but he at length observed with deep bitterness—

"'It is very strange, sir, that you should wonder at the reluctance I expressed with regard to a union which would not, I imagine, have been very agreeable to you.'

"'I am glad to learn that it was merely reluctance—a perfectly justifiable feeling—you expressed,' very calmly said his uncle.

"'Sir,' answered Charles, turning towards him, and speaking in a low and measured tone, 'you have taken advantage of your superior position, and of the opportunities daily intercourse afforded you, to deprive me of the affections of a woman I loved. Perhaps you now exult in the conviction of having supplanted a younger and less experienced man; perhaps she now rejoices in the belief of being at last rid of an affection sincere whilst it lasted, and with which she trifled most heartlessly; but this I can say: if I know aught of your temper and character, she will not find in you the submission she exacted from me; if I know aught of her, you will soon grow weary of gratifying her vanity and caprice: to time, therefore, I can intrust my vengeance and her punishment.'

"'You say I have supplanted you,' replied his uncle, with something like disdain; 'know that the woman who would have had so much as a day's affection for you could never have been but a stranger to me. With regard to your predictions,' he added, after a slight pause, 'you can know nothing of a future which is still a mystery to me.'

"'And about which you feel much doubt,' bitterly observed Charles.

"No one replied. Monsieur de Sainville neither moved nor looked towards me. A burning blush overspread my features; the glass door still stood open, I turned towards it and stepped out without looking behind me. I walked on. I believe the sun was setting in the west, and that a golden glow filled the long lime-tree avenue; but I saw not either earth or sky; my head felt light and dizzy; I knew not on what I trod: a rushing sound was in my ears; my veins ran fire; I felt conscious of nothing save the quickened pulsations of my beating heart. When I stopped at length, I found myself near the recess of the sleeping nymph; that spot against which he had once warned me, and where he had said the shadow of death—I knew what shadow he meant—still lingered. This place was on my path; nothing could be more natural than for me to find myself there, yet a strange pang shot through my heart. Am I growing superstitious? Is the belief in signs and omens superstition? Are there certain moments of excitement when revelations unheeded in our calmer moods are felt acutely? I know not. Yet though I felt thus, I entered as if an instinct I could not control always brought me to this spot. I sat down on the stone bench; the coolness of the falling waters did me good. I stayed there until the sun had set; as I then rose and turned away to go, I stopped short much vexed. Monsieur de Sainville entered. I did not like this; for I felt in my heart that I had not come there to be followed; whether he perceived this, I know not. He addressed me with his usual composure; indeed rather coldly than otherwise. Having gone up to his aunt's *boudoir*, and learnt from her that it was my intention to go this same evening, and at the same time having ascertained that I was not gone, he had concluded I was in the garden, and wishing to speak to me, had come there for that purpose. There is something particularly chilling in such methodical explanations. I could not well refuse to hear him, but I felt that I stood on the grass-plat before him as cool and indifferent as the nymph in her niche. He looked abstracted for a few moments, then said:

"'I found my aunt disconoslate at the idea of your departure; she is greatly attached to you.'

"'Yes, sir,' I replied, a little surprised, 'I believe she is."

"'And I believe,' he continued, 'that you are attached to her.'

"'O, yes, of course.'

"'Ay, you have a kind heart, and affections easily won.'

"'Not so easily, sir,' I answered, a little sharply; for in my present mood I took this as a hint, and therefore a sort of insult.

"'Surely,' said he, looking at me with some surprise, there is nothing offensive in that?'

"I did not answer.

"'I alluded to it,' he continued, 'because I hope to induce you to remain in Sainville with my aunt.'

"'It is quite impossible,' I quickly replied.

"'Why so?' he urged; 'is it your former objection that still subsists? Know then that Charles is gone and will not return in haste.' I had thought as much, yet it shocked me to hear this. I dare say he guessed what I felt, for he quickly added:

"'We did not part in anger. Unless when he allows—rarely, it must be confessed—his temper to overcome his prudence, Charles is a very sensible young man. On learning the substance of the last conversation I had with his poor mother, he became quite resigned to his destiny.'

"I inwardly concluded, and I believe I was not far short of the truth, that Madame Marceau, seeing the failure of all her schemes, had thrown herself on her brother's mercy, and that her son had therefore sufficient motive of resignation. 'Thus you see,' continued Monsieur de Sainville, 'this objection is quite removed.'

"'I cannot stay, sir,' I said, annoyed at his persistency.

"'But if you leave,' he resumed, 'think how dreary it will be for my poor aunt, when I am away, as I often shall be; think how lonely the garden will become! Who will go to look at the flowers in the greenhouse, or sit in the lime-tree avenue? Why, the staircase itself will miss your step, ever quick and impatient like yourself.'

"He spoke in a low and kind tone; but I was not disposed to be mollified, so I coldly answered:

"'Madame de Sainville can find some other companion.'

"'None she would love half so well.—Have I persuaded you?' I shook my head.

"'Pray what is your objection?' I did not answer.

"'Surely,' he continued, 'it cannot be the presence of one well nigh old enough to be your father?'

"'And cold enough,' I thought, but I carelessly said:

"'Oh dear, no!'

"'Besides,' he resumed, 'I shall be so little at home. I have projected a long expedition: first, to Italy, which I have never seen; then along the Mediterranean, which I scarcely know; and thence to Spain, which I want to see again. What do you say to this *itinéraire?*'

"He looked at me, but I was on my guard, and could meet his look very composedly.

"'Charming!' I replied, convinced that he spoke thus for the kind purpose of vexing me, and resolved to show him it was not exactly in his power to do so.

"'Is that all you have to say?' he asked, after a pause.

"'I can add the usual wish: *bon voyage.*'

"'Indeed!' said he, and looked slightly piqued.

"'But you will remain here with my aunt?' he added.

"'No, sir.'

"'No! Why so?'

"'Because I will not.'

"'True woman's reason, and yet I know you like Sainville in your heart.'

"'Indeed I do not,' I cried, almost angrily.

"He smiled, and resumed his advantage at once.

"'And what has this poor dwelling ever done to you?' he asked.

"I did not reply, but I made a motion to pass by him—he had stood at the entrance of the semicircle all this time. He did not move to let me go, but detained me, and said, in a low and altered tone:—

"'Will you hear me?'"

Nathalie paused in her recital, and her sister could feel her trembling slightly.

"Are you chill?" she asked; "why do you shiver so?"

"Because, Rose, that moment seems to live over again as I speak, and then I trembled from head to foot. He said again: 'Will you hear me?' but I did not reply; I could not speak; my heart was beating fast; it did not seem with fear, nor was it yet with hope. He asked me again if I would hear him, and again I remained silent.

"'Oh! child, child!' he exclaimed in a tone of reproach, you must surely feel that we cannot part thus. Do you already know your power, that you trifle with me so? Is it resentment or caprice? or are you, indeed, unconscious! know you so little what woman ever knows so well?'"

"Well?" inquiringly said Rose, as her sister had paused again.

"Oh! Rose, why repeat what one so staid and grave would only deem folly?"

"Did you answer him?" asked Rose, without heeding the objection.

"No, I did not."

"And what did he say?"

A deeper color overspread the features of the young girl, whose head still rested on her sister's shoulder. She hesitated slightly, and lowered her voice, as she replied:

"He told me that he loved me; not once, or twice, did he say so, but over and over again; ay, many a time. His look, his voice, his very tones, were changed. As the thrilling and impassioned accents rang in my ear, I felt as if the pulses of my heart for a moment stood still; I knew not whether I breathed or lived; but it seemed as if the outward world had vanished,—as if I stood in some new and unknown region, unconscious of all things, save one rapturous thought. We stood in that quiet spot, asunder, though face to face; he spoke, I listened; the moon had made her way to the midway heavens; every thing around was touched with a soft pale light; the dark cypresses rose against the deep blue sky, and their low whispering sound blended with the murmur of the falling waters. Surely deep joy resembles sorrow, for as I stood there, a sudden sense of the instability of all earthly things came over me, and in the folly and delirium of my heart, I prayed that this moment might last for ever."

"Was this all?" said Rose; "did he say no more?"

"He said much more, Rose, much about the past, and there being no further misunderstanding between us. Oh! how kindly and tenderly he spoke. And when he ceased, he laid his hand upon my head, gently, and yet firmly, as if by the act he were claiming and making me his for ever. I looked up; there was no denial on my lips, none in my heart, and yet I felt subdued by a power to which I blindly yielded, and which I as blindly loved. Oh! Rose, this was very unlike your rebellious sister. How could I once have believed what is yet most true; that I should live to be charmed by this sense of yielding and dependence?"

"What else did he say?" asked Rose, as Nathalie paused again.

There was a brief silence.

"Never mind what he said, Rose. Ah! me, I fear love's language was never made to be repeated. What has been the mutual and impassioned delight of two hearts, leaves a third cold and unmoved. I dare not tell you all he said, all I heard and listened to with averted look and beating heart. You would surely think me very foolish, nor perchance deem him over wise; yet I will tell you this, Rose, because it is the joy and the delight of my being to hear even my own lips repeat it: he loves me; yes, he loves me. Think of me what you will, I will confess to you, Rose, that as I stood there, whilst he spoke to me thus, I felt with a strange joy I cannot define, that she, for whose sake he had ever shunned this spot—she, whose image had once risen before him, between us, and checked the very words on his lips,—she, the beautiful, the lovely maiden, the passion of his youth, had faded from his memory, and lay forgotten in her grave, whilst I alone was loved and remembered. Oh! yes, he loves me with passion, honor, truth, and tenderness, all blending in one deep and holy feeling. Did I ever say he was cold? Then believe it not, or rather believe me when I tell you that the coldness of his years may be in his look, and on his brow, but oh! Rose, not in his heart. There the warmth, the sacred fire of youth are living and fervent still. You sigh! Do not chide; do not breathe a word to dispel a dream—if it is indeed a dream—so delightful and so pure. I am young, and in youth life is sweet; I have wondered how it ever could be called sad; I have rejoiced in the consciousness of existence with that light, buoyant feeling and nameless joy which rise in the heart when we are in the first spring and freshness of our years; but I have lived to learn that to love and be loved is a deeper joy, and a happiness more exquisite still. Say that I am foolish, if you will, but do not seek to undeceive me; I would not believe you, Rose, indeed I would not. A boundless and holy faith lives in my heart. I did not feel saddened on bidding him farewell, this evening, even though I knew we should not soon meet again. Had he been going on some distant journey, I should not have felt it, in the fulness of my joy. Time exists no more for me; I feel as if sorrow, separation, and all that the heart dreads, were powerless now. Rose, I stand on a rock, which all this world's grief and sorrows will assail in vain."

Tears of emotion dimmed her eyes as she spoke. If Rose doubted; if she thought that this fire of passion would die away, like every fire of earth; if she thought that the anchor of faith, on which her sister leaned so securely, would in the end prove a broken reed, she was merciful, and said nothing.

◆

CHAPTER XXVI.

The life and light of a happy heart had now fallen on the gloomy dwelling of Madame Lavigne. Nathalie abandoned herself to happiness, with a childish delight, which Rose sighed to see, but which, in spite of her sighing, charmed her, as all that is natural and genial must ever charm. Even Madame Lavigne acknowledged the secret power of this sudden change, and something like a smile came over her sour features as the young Provençal girl moved about the house with all the former lightness and buoyancy of her temper, singing snatches of those Provençal songs which had found favor in the blind woman's ear, and filling that cheerless abode with all the joy and gayety of her heart.

"Do you not long to be rid of all this noise?" she suddenly asked, addressing her ungracious hostess on the afternoon following her return from the château.

"My dear little Nathalie," soothingly observed the blind woman, to whom this noise was a real blessing, "you must never mind what I say when I am a little put out; stay here as long as you like; you know how fond I am of you."

Here the door opened, and Désirée looked in.

"A servant brought these from Madame de Sainville for Mademoiselle Montolieu," she said.

And as she spoke, she extended her hand, which held a small but exquisite bouquet of flowers.

Nathalie threw down her task, and eagerly sprang forward to receive it.

"What! *these?*" sharply asked Madame Lavigne; "do you imagine, Rose, that if I allow your sister to be here, it is to be pestered with foolish messages from those people at the château?"

"It is only flowers, aunt," quietly answered Rose.

"Let me smell them, then," replied her aunt, with evident mistrust.

Nathalie very reluctantly handed the bouquet to her. Madame Lavigne took it, held it a while before her face, then threw it down contemptuously, exclaiming:—

"I hate flowers!"

"You are very ill-natured," angrily cried Nathalie, picking up the bouquet, which had suffered from the fall; "my poor flowers!" she added with evident chagrin.

The blind woman laughed.

"*Eh, bon Dieu!*" she said, with her ill-natured smile, "how fond we have become all at once of that foolish old Canoness! But what on earth tempts her to send you her flowers, now? she never thought of that before."

Rose looked up with a half smile at her sister, whose blushing face was now bending over the flowers, as if to inhale their fragrance.

The Canoness still kept to her room; the flowers were evidently not of garden growth. Rose had often understood from Nathalie that no profane hand was ever allowed to touch Monsieur de Sainville's greenhouse plants; it was not hard for her to guess from whom, though sent in the name of the Canoness, the flowers really came.

To Madame Lavigne's indignation a similar bouquet came every morning for Nathalie.

On the fifth day the flowers were accompanied by a note from the Canoness, expressing her great chagrin at not seeing her young friend, and hoping that as Monsieur de Sainville was out for the day, she might enjoy the pleasure of her company. Nathalie silently handed the note to her sister, with whom she was then sitting alone.

"I suppose you intend to go?" said Rose.

"Yes, I shall go this afternoon," replied Nathalie, without meeting her look.

"Oh! how glad I am you are come, Petite," said the Canoness, as Nathalie entered her *boudoir* in the early part of the same afternoon.

She did indeed look glad, and Nathalie too was pleased; pleased to see her kind old friend, and to enter that house which she now considered as her future home. She sat down in her old place at the feet of the Canoness, listened with unwearied patience to her lamentations on the dull life she led, consoled her gently when she spoke of her late niece, and finally succeeded in restoring her to something like her former state of mind.

"Ah! Petite," sighed the Canoness, as they sat together after dinner, "if you would only not be so perverse, if you would only remain here with me. Armand is very kind, certainly, but still it is not all. Now, about those flowers: he knew I wished to send you some, and took the trouble of gathering them himself every day; then, when he went away this morning, he came up merely to advise me to ask you to come over, because he said it would please and do me so much good; then, as he knows how dull I must feel, he comes and sits with me every evening."

"Does he talk much?" asked Nathalie.

"No, Petite, but he makes me talk; and knowing there is no subject I like half so well, he says, 'Come, aunt, say something about Petite.'"

"About me!" cried Nathalie, with a startled look.

"Yes, Petite, but you need not mind it; it is only done to please me. He scarcely listens, but just smiles now and then at some of your odd sayings. He tries to look interested and amused, but you understand, child, that I have too much penetration to be so easily deceived."

The Canoness drew herself up very consequentially; Nathalie smiled archly. Towards dusk, Aunt Radegonde began to feel "meditative." Nathalie encouraged her in the mood. "Her eyes were fatigued with working," she said. "She would not ring for the lamp, but sit and meditate too by the fireside." And so it was; in five minutes the Canoness had dropped into her deepest reflections, whilst Nathalie, sitting on a low couch facing her, listened eagerly for a sound that came not. It came at length: the tramp of the distant horse—the clatter of hoofs in the avenue—the well-known step on the staircase. She hesitated a moment, then sprang from her seat to the window. The rose-colored curtains closed on her as Monsieur de Sainville entered. The fire burned bright and clear. She could see his face, the rapid look he threw around him, the brief disappointment which clouded his brow as he paused for a moment in the centre of the room. But he came forward, sat on the couch she had left, took up a book lying on the table, and began reading very attentively by the firelight. He had made little or no noise, and his aunt did not waken. His composure piqued Nathalie; she waited a while, then softly came forward, and laid her hand on the page he was reading. He never looked up, but quietly said, "Pray, do not; it is an interesting passage."

"Then you saw me, after all!" she exclaimed, in a vexed tone.

He raised his eyes, smiled, and making her sit down on the couch by his side, laid his hand on her head, and looked into her face.

"My poor child," he said, "you cannot deceive even in little things. You hid yourself, and left your fan lying here on the couch; the first thing I saw was the firelight shining on its little jet chain."

"And how did you know it was my fan? I never used it but once on the day of the *fête*. I brought it to-night to show Marraine that it was not, as she imagined, lost."

He did not answer her question, but said: "You liked that *fête*, I believe?"

"I never danced with so much pleasure."

"And you like dancing?"

She laughed, in a way that said, "I believe so;" then suddenly became grave, and said "she was not so very fond of dancing, after all. She liked it, of course, but could very well live without it." He smiled.

"Would she give it up if he were to ask her?"

"Yes, she would."

"My poor little thing!" he kindly said, "you surely do not think me so selfish? I have not forgotten your wistful face when I found you lying with my aunt beneath the beech-tree, nor yet your joyous look when you danced away so gayly. Be assured, neither *fête*, dance, nor pleasure shall fail you."

In spite of her ready acquiescence with his supposed wish, Nathalie now felt and looked charmed.

"Would he indeed take her to balls, and should there be *fêtes* in Sainville? She did not mean charity *fêtês*, but other *fêtes?* How delightful!"

"So, Petite," he replied, "you really thought that *fête* was given for charity's sake? Oh! how deep you are! how much penetration you have, as my aunt would say?"

He eyed her with an amused glance and smoothed away the hair from her clear brow. At first she looked at him with quiet wonder, but remembering the hints Madame Marceau had formerly dropped, she smiled archly and said, with a significant nod:

"Ah! I remember, it was about the time of the elections."

"Why you are getting quite shrewd! The elections! Yes So my sister thought too. Poor woman! she fancied my brain filled with political schemes, when the dreams of youth were wakening once more in my heart! She thought me so prudent and so wise! But Madame de Jussac saw deeper; she guessed—and let me see it—that the *fête* Rosalie thought destined to lead me to the Chamber, was only given after all to procure a day's pleasure to a young and merry little girl."

"For me!" exclaimed Nathalie bewildered, "for me that *fête* which cost so much—to which so many people came—that *fête* was given for me?"

"Why not, Petite?"

He bent forward to watch her face by the changing firelight, and evidently enjoyed the pleased wonder expressed by her eager look and parted lips.

"And the flowers, the flowers you brought from Arles," she eagerly exclaimed, "did you go into the old house by chance? I do not think so now!"

He met her inquiring look with a smile—a smile that said much. "He loved me even then!" she quickly thought, and he who read her face so easily, replied in a low but audible tone:

"Yes, Petite, even then."

She bowed her head and clasped her hands. "God help me!" she exclaimed, "God help me! some misfortune must be near. I feel too happy!"

"Too happy!" he echoed, with sudden sadness; "Petite, Petite, there is not half enough happiness in this world. That which endures is cold and tame; that which is delightful is, alas! so brief."

He drew her towards him and held her fast, as if she were that happiness, delightful though fleeting, he longed to detain her thus for ever.

But his aunt awoke—he released her.

The Canoness promptly rang the bell, and said "*she* hated darkness." When the servant who brought the light was gone, Monsieur de Sainville rose and lightly placing his hand on Nathalie's shoulder, said calmly:

"Aunt, you see this young girl?"

"Yes," replied the Canoness, with profound astonishment, "my sight is still good, Armand, I see Petite."

"Ay, Petite," said he, smiling, "that is a pretty name, aunt, you have fixed upon; I have often thought so."

The Canoness, who was still trying to find out why her nephew had asked her if she saw Nathalie, looked puzzled and did not answer.

"Well, then," resumed Monsieur de Sainville, "when you see her you also see my future wife!"

The knitting, which had already suspended its operations, now fairly dropped from Aunt Radegonde's fingers.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed, and then looked from her nephew to Nathalie with utter amazement. "But it is not true, Petite, is it?" she added after a long pause.

"Is it true?" asked Monsieur de Sainville of Nathalie.

She still sat motionless in the same attitude in the bright light of the ardent fire; but when he spoke she rose slowly and seriously, and held out her hand to him. He clasped it firmly within his and silently looked down upon her with a smile of mingled pride and affection.

"Yes, aunt," he repeated, "you see my future wife."

"It is impossible, Armand; impossible!" said the Canoness, in a low and agitated tone.

"Impossible, aunt," he asked, looking up, "why so?"

"Because you do not, cannot think of marriage, Armand."

Her voice trembled, but she spoke emphatically.

There was a pause. Nathalie slightly turned pale. Monsieur de Sainville colored, and scarcely repressed a movement of impatience, but leaving the side of Nathalie, he went up to his aunt, took her hand in his, and said in his mildest tones:

"Forgive me, aunt; I should not have told you this so abruptly; but the past is past for ever. I thought you had understood this long ago, and forgotten what it is only needless pain to remember."

The Canoness did not reply; tears were flowing down her cheeks, and fell down on her clasped hands. She shook her head and murmured:

"Forgotten, Armand; forgotten! The lover forgets his mistress, the wife her husband; but the woman who has had or reared a child never forgets it."

Her nephew allowed her emotion to subside before he said gently:

"Aunt, will you not embrace your niece?"

But Nathalie did not advance to receive the expected kiss, nor did the Canoness look up or offer to give it.

"Niece," she echoed with a deep sadness; "ay, I had a niece once!"

She spoke almost inaudibly; perhaps Monsieur de Sainville did not hear her, for he continued:

"Why do you not look up, aunt? You are surely not afraid of the face of your new relative?"

The Canoness slowly raised her mild blue eyes, and fastened a mournful glance on the bright face and graceful form of the young girl; she detected the proud and admiring look which her nephew cast on his betrothed as he spoke,—a look that said how far from indifferent he was to each charm and grace of her who stood by his side.

"Yes, she is young and pretty," sadly said Aunt Radegonde; "young and pretty, Armand, I grant it; but another was so once."

Monsieur de Sainville looked displeased, turned away, and paced the narrow *boudoir* with an impatient step.

"Aunt," said he, stopping once more near to his aunt's chair, "you mean no unkindness; but surely Mademoiselle Montolieu is entitled to something more from you."

The Canoness started slightly: a struggle between her own secret feelings, and her habitual respect for her nephew's will, was evidently taking place within her: "Petite knows that I love her dearly," she said at length, "and therefore she knows that I wish her every happiness."

"And you are of course glad that she is to become my wife?" persisted her nephew.

The Canoness stopped to pick up her knitting; if she had heard what Monsieur de Sainville said, she did not reply. Ere long she rose; she wanted something in the next room, she said. It was some time before she returned.

A deep silence succeeded her departure. Nathalie had resumed her seat; Monsieur de Sainville was walking up and down the room; he suddenly stopped short, looked at Nathalie, and said:

"What are you looking at?"

"Nothing," she quickly replied.

"Petite," said he gravely, "how often must I tell you that deceit is not your *forte*. If you did not wish me to see that you were looking at this portrait you should not have kept your eyes fastened upon it, as if a spell forbade you to remove them. What charm do you find in it?"

"It is very beautiful, is it not?" she hesitatingly replied, and turned round to look at him, as she spoke. His face was serious but very calm.

"Yes, extremely beautiful," he replied; "and the original, of whom I see you know something, was one of the loveliest creatures this earth ever knew. A poet once called her a flower; indeed she was one, but too frail, too weak, not to be swayed by every breeze."

"One of the loveliest creatures this earth ever knew!" echoed Nathalie in her thoughts; "and it is true," she added, inwardly again glancing at the portrait which seemed to be smiling down on her in its eternal and serene loveliness.

Monsieur de Sainville sat down by her side.

"Petite," said he, in a low tone, "you should not look at that portrait only; there is another in this room, less angel-like no doubt, far more human, but, in my belief, far more beautiful. Come, look at my Aunt Adelaide; she is dark, but frankness, truth, and courage are on her brow. There is pride in the curl of her lip, in the arch of her neck, but soul and tenderness in her eyes. She would not say she loved a man, and yet agree to marry another, whilst he was away trusting in her faith. If she loved—however imperfect might be the object of her love—however harsh and exacting he might have shown himself—yet would she remain true, and love him, not as a passionless being, but as a woman; not as if he were a friend or brother, but as a woman loves her lover or her husband. Come, would she not?"

"Yes," slowly replied Nathalie. There was a pause.

"Which do you like best?" she asked abruptly, turning round.

"The last, Petite, the last," he replied, smiling at the question, and yet his voice sounded true.

"Tell me all about it," she said, after a while.

"It is a brief story. Lucile was my aunt's favorite niece, and my cousin. We were brought up together and betrothed. During my absence she agreed to marry a husband of her father's selection. When I came back she repented her weakness and offered to break her engagement—I refused."

"Why so?"

"Why!" he echoed with some surprise, "because no woman whose love is true will break through a sacred engagement. Besides, what man of delicacy cares to wed her who has been the betrothed of another?"

"A delicacy women must not feel of course," thought Nathalie, with some bitterness. But she said nothing, and Monsieur de Sainville was too confident of the privileges of his sex to dream that such a thought might offer itself to the young girl.

"What was she like?" she resumed after a pause.

"Who, my cousin? Why, what tempts you to talk about her?"

"Do you object?" she quickly asked.

"Really no," he composedly replied; "but there is her portrait,—a striking likeness."

"What was she like in feeling, temper, and character?"

"A charming, gentle creature, who never had a will of her own—who yielded to me in every thing."

"You liked that of course."

"No, Petite; for she yielded to every one, and divided submission is like divided affection—worthless."

"But she grieved deeply, did she not?" asked Nathalie, whom a painful curiosity still impelled to learn more.

Monsieur de Sainville looked slightly moved.

"Well, perhaps she did; but not to the extent that has been said," he at length replied. "She had always been delicate, and her mother was consumptive; this accounts for her early death. But have we not enough of this, Petite?

"Only one question more: is it not for her sake you shun the recess of the sleeping nymph?"

"Oh, you daughter of Eve," he said, with a sigh and a wistful look, "Lucile is dead in my heart. It is not her spirit, poor girl, that haunts the spot she once loved, the spot where I have met her so often, but the pale and dreary ghost of a dead affection."

A sudden terror entered the heart of Nathalie. "Shall I too die in your heart? Shall I too die there some day?" she quickly asked, her eyes filling with tears.

"God forbid, my poor child," he replied very earnestly; "I will not think of death in any shape for you."

She looked up joyous at once. A stop was put to the conversation by the entrance of Aunt Radegonde. Monsieur de Sainville was sitting near Nathalie; he had laid his arm on the back of the couch, and was in the act of stooping to speak to her, when his aunt entered. He did not look up or change his attitude, but Nathalie detected the troubled and dreary look with which the Canoness eyed them both as she paused near the door.

Aunt Radegonde resumed her place, her knitting, talked on various subjects, addressed her nephew, then Nathalie, but though she strove to be both cheerful and conversational, she was so evidently ill at ease, that instead of remaining until Nathalie's departure, Monsieur de Sainville, taking pity on his aunt, left the *boudoir* at an early hour. The conversation ceased entirely when he was gone. Nathalie sat near the table, her elbow leaning upon it, and the hand which supported her head also shading her eyes. At length she rose, walked up to the Canoness, sat down on the stool at her feet, placed both her clasped hands on the lap of her old friend, and wistfully looking up into her face, inquired, with great earnestness :—

"Marraine, are you indeed sorry at what Monsieur de Sainville has told you ? Are you sorry to be my aunt, indeed ?"

Aunt Radegonde looked down at her, laid her two little hands on the young girl's dark hair, and gazing into her eyes as if she would read her very soul, she answered, with another question :—

"Do you love him ?"

Their looks met : the doubt, sadness, and regret of age in one glance ; the hope, the fervor, the love of youth in the other.

"With my whole heart, with my whole soul," answered Nathalie, in a low tone, but with an earnestness that deepened her color on her cheek.

"*Oh ! mon Dieu !*" mournfully exclaimed the Canoness ; "it is a fatality—a fatality !" she repeated.

"What is a fatality ?" asked Nathalie.

"Did I not warn you ?" pursued Aunt Radegonde, "did you not know the past ? Was not that enough to warn you ? Alas, no, for you love him !"

"Why alas ?" asked Nathalie with a smile.

The Canoness did not reply, but looked at her with such deep sadness that the eyes of Nathalie filled with tears.

"I see," she exclaimed, in a low tone, "I see you do not wish me to become your niece."

She made a motion to rise ; Aunt Radegonde detained her.

"Petite," she said, "it is because I love you I wish this were not to be ; but it is beyond remedy now ; the will of God be done."

There was a brief silence.

"I understand," at length observed Nathalie ; "you think he does not love me ?"

"I do not say that," very gravely replied the Canoness.

"Then what do you think?" impatiently asked the young girl.

"Oh! Petite," was the sorrowful reply, "those who have lived long like me know many sad and bitter things; they know that youth and beauty are brief gifts, and that short is the life of the longest love."

"But his love will last,' said Nathalie, in a low tone, "for he is wise, and cares little for youth or beauty."

"You do not believe what you say; no, not a word of it;" almost angrily cried the Canoness.

"And why not?" asked Nathalie, coloring deeply.

"Not care for beauty?" bitterly continued Aunt Radegonde; "why then was she so lovely, and you?—but why need I tell you that which you surely know, and which he too, trust him, knows well!"

"How can you tell?" asked Nathalie.

"How?" exclaimed the Canoness, somewhat nettled, "why by observation of course! You surely do not think I do not observe, or that all this has surprised me so very much?"

"What have you observed?" inquired the young girl.

"Oh! many, many things; I have seen him looking at you when you could not notice it, and when no doubt he thought I was minding my knitting. I have seen him lay down his paper or his book to follow you about the room with his glance; I have seen him smile at your impatient answers, and look pleased when he saw how he could with a word make your face change and light up at his will. Yes, Petite, I saw it all; often did it remind me of the times when he and Lucile were young together—often; and yet, I confess, I never suspected he wished to marry you."

Nathalie's color came and went repeatedly as she listened to Aunt Radegonde; she knew not whether to be glad or sorrowful; so strangely was the joy which she felt mingled with an acute sense of pain.

"Well," resumed the Canoness, with a sigh, "what is done is done; he loves you, you love him; and all you have to do is to be very careful."

"How so?" asked Nathalie, looking up, with a smile.

"Petite, he is a strange man, exacting and severe,—remember that."

"I am neither submissive nor gentle, and he knows it," said Nathalie, rather haughtily.

"Yield to him, yield to him; it is best," urged the Canoness, anxiously.

But this well-meant advice was very ill-timed. Nathalie was of those who yield from impulse, and never from motives of expediency.

"I submit to and obey no man," she replied, very decisively.

The Canoness looked at her with evident uneasiness, but forbore to urge the point; her thoughts had reverted to the feelings of surprise created in her by her nephew's announcement.

"Who would have thought he would have cared about you?" she thoughtfully observed; "who above all could have imagined you, so young, so gay, could like him! It is a mystery all—a profound mystery."

The Canoness solemnly shook her head, but Nathalie smiled to herself. It was a mystery, and one which charmed and provoked her. Why did she love him? She scarcely knew. Why did he love her? She knew not at all, and would have given any thing to know.

The conversation languished, and soon ceased entirely. Nathalie left early. It was a clear moonlight night, and she declined the escort of a servant. Scarcely, however, had the iron gate closed upon her, when she was overtaken by Monsieur de Sainville.

"Going alone, along this solitary road, at this hour?" he reprovingly said, as he took her arm within his.

"I am not afraid," replied Nathalie.

"No, I dare say not. Fear and timidity are not much in your character."

"And yet Marraine wants me to be afraid of you."

"Why so?"

"She says it is dangerous to vex you."

"Will you be afraid?" he asked, with a keen look.

"No, indeed!"

"Do not, Petite; do not."

"Make yourself easy," she decisively replied.

He smiled at her tone. They walked on in silence. She asked him to leave her, when they had reached the entrance of the town. He acceded to her wish. They stood at an angle of the lonely road. He requested her to turn to the light, so that he might see her.

"Why so?" she asked.

"Because I am going away to-morrow, for a fortnight."

"And my poor face might be forgotten in those two weeks."

But she complied with his request The moonlight fell full on his features, as well as on hers.

"Where are you going?" she asked, "to Marmont?"

"No, much further; to Paris."

"To Paris!" she echoed, in a tone of chagrin.

"Yes, indeed; and as I may be detained longer, it is quite needful, you see, to look at you well."

He spoke in a light tone, and yet Nathalie thought she could detect the accent of regret in his voice. Why should he not be sorry, even at this brief separation, when she felt that tears trembled in her eyes? He had taken both her hands in his, and was looking at her fixedly. There was affection, yes, she felt in her heart, true and deep affection, in his gaze; not indeed romantic adoration, but that deeper feeling which unites the cherishing love of the father to the lover's tenderness. She felt that she was for him no divinity to be worshipped, but a being to be loved, protected, and screened from ill. She said to herself this was the love she preferred, but had it been of a most opposite nature, she would have said the same thing still.

"Good night, my child, take care of yourself," said he gently; and with this quiet adieu they parted.

Nathalie walked on a few steps, then stood still.

"Yes, he loves me," she said to herself, as if this were a recent discovery; "he loves me, I feel it; but oh! that I only knew why, and for how long?"

The unavailing and tormenting wish pursued her still. Oh! to look into his heart, but for one second; to read there the source and secret of her power; to know the spell which bound him; the nameless charm which had attracted him first, and would bewitch him for ever.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Three weeks passed away, Monsieur de Sainville did not return; but his letters were neither cold nor few; Nathalie felt almost content.

On the close of the last day of the third week, she went to the château. The evening was warm, bright, and still; a golden mellow light pervaded earth and sky. She stopped near the iron gate, to glance admiringly at the landscape beneath. A beggar woman passing by, took advantage of the pause, to come up and tell her a long story of misfortune. Perhaps it was true, and perhaps it was not, but Nathalie believed every word of it, and immediately put her hand into her pocket. There was no money there.

"How sorry I am," she exclaimed, with evident regret.

The woman, taking this as an excuse not to give, repeated her lamentable recital.

"*Mon Dieu!* I would give any thing for my purse," sorrowfully exclaimed Nathalie.

A brown silk purse fell with a clinking sound in the dust at her feet. She uttered a faint cry, looked up eagerly, and beheld Monsieur de Sainville, who had ridden up, unheard, bending from his saddle with a smile. She clapped her hands.

"I am so glad," she exclaimed joyously; her eyes danced with pleasure.

"No wonder, you were longing for a purse, and lo! there drops down one at your feet! Let me tell you, purses, and well-filled ones especially, are not always to be had for the wishing."

She laughed, picked up the purse, opened it, emptied the contents of one end of it into the beggar-woman's hand, and tossed it back to its owner. He weighed it in his hand.

"It feels lighter, Petite."

"Yes, purses were made to be emptied."

"My experience says they must be filled first."

"You said a fortnight, and it is three weeks to-day," observed Nathalie, without heeding his remark, or the loud benedictions of the departing beggar-woman.

"You welcome me with a reproach," he said; but he knew in his heart that such reproaches are a welcome. And was there not true joyous welcome in the flushed cheeks and laughing eyes that now looked up into his face?

"Petite," he added, with a smile, "you have stipulated that a certain circumstance shall remain a profound secret to every human being with the exception of my discreet aunt. But if we go in together, and you keep looking up with that smiling, treacherous face, I fear much that the great mystery, and of course not a soul in the château suspects any thing of the kind, will be betrayed. Had you not, therefore, better go in first?"

Nathalie drew herself up with an offended air. She did not know what Monsieur de Sainville meant. She was not going to the château at all. She was taking a walk in the country, and begging to be remembered to Madame de Sainville, she bade him good evening, and congratulated him on his safe return.

He saw her depart with a secure smile that piqued her. She pretended to walk on, then suddenly retraced her steps along the high wall that inclosed the garden and grounds of the château, until she came to a side-door, of which Aunt Radegonde had given her a key, which she now put in with a smile at her ruse; but for once the door resisted; it was bolted within. She tried again; the bolt was withdrawn, the door opened, and there stood Monsieur de Sainville smiling at her vexation.

"Well, what about it?" she rather sharply said.

"Nothing," he quietly replied.

She condescended to enter, take his arm, and walk down one of the alleys with him.

He had soon appeased her. This evening time was so pleasant, and he seemed in so genial and happy a mood. He was full of projects for the future. Of pleasant excursions to the south of France; of home pleasures, not less delightful: besides, was he not going to resign the empire of the greenhouse to her, and to build her an aviary?

"All of which will help to empty your purse," said Nathalie, looking delighted, however.

"Wise remark! *Apropos:* do you often dispense charity so freely as this evening? Do you know how much you gave the lady in the ragged cloak?"

"I neither know nor care how much it was; I am sure she needed it. Her husband was killed in Algiers; her eldest son died of fever; her daughter is blind; her three younger children are lying ill at home with the measles; and she herself is lame, as you could see."

"I saw, Petite, that she went off very nimbly; but no matter, I am glad it was my purse suffered, not your little purse, my child."

"Oh, but I have got money in my little purse!" said Nathalie, rather nettled.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! I was very economical at Mademoiselle Dantin's, and I saved three hundred and thirty-five francs."

Monsieur de Sainville looked down at the possessor of three hundred and thirty-five francs with a kind smile, and again said "Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! Do not think, however, you will make me fancy you consider it so much; I know you do not. But what need I care? This garden is very pleasant; the grounds are lovely; the château is a rare old place; and poor girl as I am now, they will all be mine some day. I like the thought that every thing is to come to me through you: it seems pleasant to be mistress, because you are master."

"And it is kind and frank of you to say so, Petite," said he, stopping short to look at her.

"The most agreeable thought of all," she continued, without heeding this, "is that you will go away so often."

"What?"

"Yes, it will be so pleasant when you return."

She spoke unhesitatingly, for though she was shy enough of a caress, she was not so of speech, as free and open as her heart. He took both her hands, and stood holding them in his, and looking down at her with evident emotion.

"Petite," said he, "you have, thank heaven, too little experience to know the delightful flattery of such language. You do not know there is nothing so delightful in this world as the happy smiling face that welcomes our return—because—alas—there is nothing so rare. Oh! Petite, my child, my darling, always greet me with that face which looked up into mine this evening."

He stooped and kissed her brow, and that with so much tenderness of the heart, so little of the lover's passion, that she forgave the caress. She felt very happy; she said so, adding, with a smile:—

"And this will last for ever, will it not?"

His face became obscured; he did not answer.

"It will last for ever?" she repeated inquiringly.

"For ever!" he echoed; "what has brought up that unlucky word, Petite?"

But she asked again if it would not last for ever?

"What is there lasts for ever in this world?" he answered, after a pause.

"By for ever, I mean as long as life."

"And, child-like, call our miserable little existence—eternity! Do you remember the day on which you said you did not see why life should not endure for ever?"

"Yes, but that is not the question. Will you love me for ever?"

He silently smoothed away the hair from her brow—a caress familiar to him. She repeated her question to him with an anxious look. He smiled, and asked, "If for ever was not a very long time?"

But she shook her head: "She would have an answer."

"And vows too, he supposed."

"No, she did not care for vows; she only wanted a plain answer to a plain question."

"You shall have your wish," he replied, rather sadly. "But, oh! why do you long for the sad knowledge of good and evil? Without the apple looks fair and tempting, within it is bitter as ashes."

"What do you call the knowledge of good and evil?" gravely asked Nathalie.

"Every thing connected with our perishable nature, and its affections more frail, more perishable still."

She colored, and said, "She was sure that was a very great mistake. She knew that love or affection was much, yes, much more enduring than life." She spoke decisively, but looked doubtful and anxious. He said nothing.

"Why do you not believe this?" she at length abruptly asked.

"Because experience has told me another tale. I have not seen that affection more enduring than life."

"What matter, provided it exists; provided we two feel it, for we shall, shall we not?"

"Undoubtedly, Petite; we two shall prove exceptions to the whole human race."

There was raillery in his tone, but sadness in his look. He turned pale.

"How long will you love me?" she asked.

"As long as I can, Petite. May that be for ever!"

"I understand," she said bitterly. "Your love is weak: you know it, and you are too honorable to deceive."

She bowed her head, for tears had gathered in her eyes.

"My dear child," said he, in his gentlest and kindest tones; "why, after making me tell you such bitter truths, are you so unjust? If I tell you I do not know how long my love will last, it is by no means because I think it will be brief, but because I really do not know; such is the condition of humanity. May it last for ever! Many ways of happiness have been discovered by man, but all agree there is none so pleasant as loving and being loved. I pretend not to wisdom above my race; let this happiness but be mine, and I am content; believe me, I shall do all I can to preserve it. Alas! Petite; who knows if it is not your heart that satiety shall first enter? You look incredulous and indignant. Then question me no more; keep your curious restless mind quiet, you little daughter of Eve; it may all be as you say. Besides, do not sages declare that when love takes flight, sober friendship, who has no such airy wings, comes and settles down in his place?"

Nathalie smiled disdainfully.

"I scorn such a hope," she said, indignantly; "friendship after love! I would as soon have winter after spring! Besides, how can one have faith in a feeling that rests on the ruin of another feeling?"

"It may not be wise to say so," replied Monsieur de Sainville, "and yet I agree with you there. No; when love is dead I would have him buried, not resuscitated under so cold a guise."

"But why must love die?" she despondingly asked.

"Because, I suppose, of humanity's imperfections. But, child, why trouble your little head with such things? In all conscience, have you not time enough for doubt and sorrow? Love is the creed of youth, and faith the daily bread of that religion of the heart. Deem your love immortal if you will, you shall not find mine less fervent or true for all his mortality. The freshness of morning is around you still, and you stand on the dawn of your long summer's day. Imagine it endless; and though it be but a dream, I, who have almost passed the noonday's heat, will not quarrel with the child-like faith. Be happy in your ignorance, my knowledge shall not deprive me of all joy. The thought of evening's setting sun need not mar the gladness of present hours. Is life unavoidably embittered by the thought of death? Is there no happiness but that which is eternal?"

"I wish we had the same faith," sorrowfully said Nathalie, "I wish that our feelings were more in unison; I wish—do not misunderstand me if I say so—that we were not divided by so many years; and the sad knowledge which it seems they give; I wish that I were an older woman, or you a younger man."

She hesitated a little, and looked up to see if he were not offended, but he only smiled:—

"You an older woman and I a younger man! Well, child, you have curious fancies. What a demure little lady of thirty you would make; and yet—see my bad taste—I prefer you thus. I would even, if this were a power given to mortal man fix you for ever, as I see you at this moment, and enchant you into a vision of that perpetual youth which becomes you so well. I was made to be old and grave, but nature fashioned you in the morning, and verily one cannot look at you without seeing that the freshness of the early hour lingers around you still. Oh! wish not to grow old; time will overtake you but too soon.. As for the other wish, of my being a younger man; let me tell you, that if I had seen you in my youth, I should not have loved you."

"You would not?" said Nathalie, much surprised.

"No, indeed I would not."

"And why so?" she asked, a little nettled.

"Because you are not the *beau ideal* of my youth."

"Pray, what was the *beau ideal* of your youth?"

"A very different woman from you, my little Nathalie; for she was fair and gentle as a lily; a sinless being, scarcely treading this earth of ours."

"Would you love this angel lady now?"

"Love a being so cold and so unearthly? No."

Every feature of Nathalie beamed as she heard this decisive reply. But she assumed a grave air.

"It seems," she said, "that I am very faulty."

"You are very human."

"And not ideal?"

"Not in the least. What is an ideal woman? The pale sickly creation of some mad youth, or still more crazy poet: a chilling snow-wreath."

"And what am I?"

"A streak of sunshine to gladden the sight and warm the heart; but no, I will not be poetical; you are simply a being of our perishable earth, with a temper like an April day, but a heart of the most honest and true."

A blush of pleasure stole over Nathalie's cheek, and she turned her head away with a smile, but she soon looked round again.

"You like me thus?" she said.

"Precisely; I love you thus."

"A little?"

"Very much, Petite."

"And you will love me for ever, will you not?"

She had come back again to the old point with the caressing persistency of a child that will not be denied. He looked at her; she tried to seem indifferent, but her heart was in his answer; he felt it, and for that moment also felt as if he could turn believer in her creed of love's eternity.

"Yes, for ever," he answered.

Her face lit up, and she smiled joyously; but checking the feeling, she said, with a wistful look:—

"You only say that to please me."

"Indeed I do not," he replied, bending a fond glance over her flushed face as he felt in his heart how delightful it was to be thus loved; "no, indeed I do not, for I verily believe, my poor child, that could I cease to feel for thee as I do now, my heart, unable to leave off, or shut thee out, would surely find some other better way of loving thee still."

A radiant smile played on Nathalie's parted lips.

"Let the future shift for itself," she said, in a low feverish tone; "I feel here that you must always love me."

"She pressed her clasped hands to her beating heart, and bowed her face before his look. An irresistible impulse made him strain her more closely to him, and calling her "his mistress, his wife, his child; all that was delightful, dear, and precious;" vow in impassioned language to love her for ever.

They went in. The sun had set; evening was closing in around them with its soft gray light. Nathalie heeded it not; for in her heart there shone a light more warm, fervent, and bright than earthly day ever gave. She was that whole evening so enchanting and bewitching, that her grave lover for once forgot his prudence and worldly knowledge; he yielded indeed so freely to the spells cast around him, that his aunt, who looked on with silent wonder, warningly whispered to Nathalie as they parted:

"Take care, Petite, it is not natural to see Armand so; take care."

"Be quite easy," said Nathalie, with a delighted glance.

Indeed she looked so joyous on returning home, that Rose could not help asking her what was the matter.

"The matter is, that I am a great deal too happy, Rose, a great deal too happy;" she kissed her sister fervently as she spoke.

But when she next met Monsieur de Sainville, Nathalie was much chagrined to perceive that his momentary weakness had wholly vanished. He was kind and affectionate; but he was once more the serious self-possessed man of experience, who condescended to be in love with the heedless girl of eighteen. The gravity of his tenderness vexed and disconcerted her: she tried to bring back the mood in which they had parted, and failed. She felt indignant: the result was a little quarrel—their first as lovers. For three days she would not go to the château. On the evening of the third day she sat with her sister in their little room, when Rose, taking up from the table the flowers Nathalie had received that same morning, reproved her for leaving them there to wither.

"I forgot them, Rose," she replied; "besides, what matter? According to his own confession his love is as perishable and will fade as soon as his gifts."

Rose was untying the flowers; a letter hidden amongst them fell down on the floor at her feet. Nathalie saw it, snatched it up with the quickness of thought, broke the seal, and drew near the light to read. The letter was long. When she had concluded she held it awhile in her hand, then gave it to Rose, saying, without looking at her:

"I have done him wrong; you must read this—his justification."

Rose silently took the letter; it was as follows—

"Nathalie, do not doubt my affection. You torment your self and give me much pain, very uselessly. Recollect that when I have said 'I love you,' I have said all in three words—pages could express no more.

"'We are so different!' you despondingly said the other evening. But is not love the child of contradictions? Do you imagine I could have loved a woman of years nearer to mine, like me rid of illusions and hope? Indeed, I could not. Our individual experience must necessarily have been similar; our looks, after meeting with sadness and mistrust, would not have sought to meet again. But in you I seek and still find what is lost to me for ever, and what is, therefore, so dear—the faith and freshness of youth.

"From the moment that you entered this house, I felt that a change I could not define had nevertheless taken place in all around me.

"I believe that many cold and severe-looking men like me, are not so averse to the society of women as they are considered to be. I certainly have not had during the course of an active and unsettled life much leisure to indulge in female society, which is essentially a luxury, as it implies a wonderful loss of time, and as constant attention is needed in order not to yield to its enervating influence; but I have always looked forward with pleasure to the time when I should be with my sister and aunt. The pleasure which men take in the society of women may be selfish, but it is very real. It is soothing after the vexing storms of life to sink down into domestic repose and become the centre of a peaceful home. The anticipation pleased me, especially as I had not run the risk—always a dangerous one — of marriage. But when I returned to France, when I summoned my aunt and sister to Sainville, I found that this destiny was not to be mine. In our first interview I saw that my poor aunt could neither forget nor forgive the past, and I required no second meeting to perceive that the proud and worldly woman who still called me brother, was not, however, the once kind and affectionate sister of my youth. Time had done its work with both—I could not blame them; was I myself unchanged? Did I not see very well that my coldness and severity repelled every one around me? Nevertheless, I felt disappointed; *ennui* soon overtook me; I resolved to travel over Europe. I had projected a long expedition when the indiscretion and insolence of Charles compelled me to offer you a home in Sainville. I say compelled, because it seemed to me that I could not in honor do less. At first I felt annoyed. 'What on earth shall I do with this girl?' I thought, for I have my idea of responsibilities, and when her son was concerned, I would not trust Madame Marceau. Wishing to explain all and put you on your guard, I resolved to see you alone. I felt also some curiosity to find out what sort of a being you were. Thanks to my wandering life, and to the seclusion in which we keep our unmarried women, I had only obtained very unsatisfactory glimpses of a few childish creatures. It is a great pity it should be thus, for surely there is nothing in this world half so charming as a young girl, when in the first freshness of her years, feelings, and purity, she stands on the threshold of life, innocent and fearless, with the curious glance of an eager and long-captive bird, wondering where and how far it shall wing its flight. I could scarcely keep grave during our first interview. You were so very peculiar—so much on the defensive—so quick to detect imaginary slights, and yet so ingenuous and so easily moved by the least kindness. I saw that life was teaching you her hard lesson, but that even this bitter knowledge could not subdue native pride, or impart acquired prudence True originality is never destroyed; it is, and remains a part of our being. But what struck me most then and afterwards, was the simplicity and fearlessness of your bearing. You were frank and daring even with me. In vain, in order to try you, I once or twice made myself stern and grave. You seemed to see intuitively through the disguise, and wearied me out by your patience.

"Indeed, Petite, the more I saw you, the more you charmed me. I liked that look which seemed to imply that with a perfect consciousness of youth and beauty, you disclaimed the praise and flattery those adventitious charms so easily win; I liked you to be so frank and daring: I liked your light, pleasant voice, and cheerful smile. When I saw you at a distance, lightly running down some garden path, and seeming to enjoy so fully the freshness and verdure around you, I thought it a pity that the old house and garden should ever lose the graceful visions which had unexpectedly dawned upon both. My heart yearned towards you long before I would, even to myself, acknowledge why; but little power has the so-called wisdom of man over that which passes in his heart. When I caught my ear listening for your step, and look abstractedly watching your every movement, I said to myself: 'she is young and pretty, and the sight of youth and beauty is pleasant; but she is such a mere child, that I could never love her seriously.' But the strange mixture of the child's audacity and of the maiden's shyness which then characterized your bearing towards me, of alternate confidence and shrinking, charmed me more irresistibly every time we met, and I took care it should be often. For now you sought, now you shunned me, with all the frankness and *naïveté* of a child. You watched me with a sort of curious glance that amused me; you seemed puzzled to make me out, interested too. I thought it was some girlish fancy, and allowed myself to be pleased with it whilst I forbore to examine too cautiously why it pleased me. 'Not through love,' I said to myself, and yet I still delayed fixing the day for my intended journey. Oh! how grave men, who deem themselves wise, can, in some things, be deceived like mere children.

"Do you remember the week Madame Marceau spent at the château of Jussac? Do you remember that the second day after she left, I said to my aunt, 'I am going to Marmont, and shall probably stay a fortnight away?' You laid down your work on your lap and looked up suddenly—not at me, but I could see you well—with an expression of so much annoyance and regret, that I could not mistake or misunderstand it One second only did it last, but I saw it and felt its meaning deeply. Nathalie, was I not a sufficiently kind brother and a reasonably good nephew? I had drawn my aunt and sister from an obscure poverty to restore them to the wealth and station of their birth. Little merit was there in that, but still I had done it. Well, then, I can assure you that I might have proposed crossing the Atlantic or talked of a pedestrian excursion to China, without either aunt or sister wearing on their features that simple expression of regret. But you, a stranger, you whom I scarcely noticed, you missed and regretted me. Instead of remaining at Marmont, I returned the next day; I was curious to see how you would look. You were in the garden with my aunt at the end of the lime-tree avenue. You sat on a low stool at the foot of a tree against which you partly leaned. Your work lay neglected on your lap, your hands were clasped upon it; I fancied you looked thoughtful. It was a bright evening; the warm light of the setting sun lit up the whole avenue, but it fell with a deeper glow on the spot where you sat. As I saw you there, with the dark tree behind you, with your white robe that fell around you in all the modest grace of woman's garment, with your downcast look and clasped hands, I thought of an old engraving of Raffaelle's 'Vierge au Palmier' I had seen years ago in the course of my northern wanderings. It had caught my fancy by its southern grace, and often, though I never met with it again, did the charming figure rise in clear outlines before me. Little did I suspect that more delightful and living vision would one day greet me in my own home. I came along the avenue; you looked up quickly, almost joyously, I could not tell whether you blushed or not, but for a moment it seemed as if the warm sunlight had fallen with a deeper and rosier glow upon your features, and lit up your eyes with a brighter radiance. I sat down near my aunt; you did not move away; I spoke, coldly enough, I dare say, but all the time there were strange tumultuous feelings in my heart; I felt, I knew that I loved you, and I said to myself that the child who then sat at my feet so quiet and unconscious, should one day be my wife and mistress of all around her. I am not of a temper to fear or hesitate; I knew you as well then as I do now. What about the difference of years! I felt I could, because I would, make you forget it; you were young, impressible, in the first freshness and fervor of your feelings; love is an easy lesson then. I resolved that you should love me in spite of years, coldness, and severity. It is an old saying that no Sainville ever attempted that which he did not achieve. It was not faith in the legend that led me, but a far surer knowledge. None had ever loved in vain but those who know not how to love.

"You were very charming and provoking; easily irritated, but also easily soothed. I watched the progress of an affection of which you were yourself unconscious. I knew even before you told me, that you did not like Charles, and so far as regarded him, I therefore felt no scruples. Nor did I think it wrong to keep you in this state of doubt, far more delightful than certain knowledge. That evening when, as we sat alone in the garden, you took my hand and raised it to your lips—lips far too pure, my child, for such homage—thanking me so innocently for a friendship and generosity that existed only in your imagination, I had not the heart to undeceive you; to tell you that I already loved you with a selfish and jealous affection; that I wanted you for myself, and myself only, and that I wished to keep you here until the day came when I might at length take you unto myself, and gather you unto my heart for ever. And yet I was not without doubts and secret fears. That same evening you fell asleep in the little saloon; my aunt too chose to meditate, as she calls it. I remained and watched you there as you slept, but not, perhaps, with the thoughts you imagine, Petite. You did indeed look very pretty so, with your head pillowed on the cushion, and your clasped hands; but I did not think of that. I only thought that thus seen in the doubtful light of that quiet place, and in all the repose of deepest slumber, you looked barely fifteen. Never had I seen you so childish in aspect. It grieved me. What folly was I on the brink of committing? Was this the boasted wisdom of Armand de Sainville? A passion for a child? I was anxiously bending to read more clearly the lines of the face of her to whom I was trusting the venture of my heart, when Madame de Jussac raised the drapery and smiled in fancied triumph at my folly. She little knew that at that same moment I was debating the question, 'Shall I or shall I not give her up, whilst it is time yet?'

"Give you up! alas, how could I? How could I relinquish her who, though gifted with grace and beauty, had yet no deeper art to win me back from sudden coldness than to step up to me like a little child, and say, 'have I done wrong?' Oh! my child, those artless ways have put me to sore trials

As you then looked up into my face, and as I saw clearly what was still dim and imperfect to you—that you loved me—it was hard to resist the temptation of imprinting on your clear brow a kiss which might have been more fervent, perhaps, than that of a father, and yet, believe me, not less pure.

"Madame de Jussac—thinking to convert me to legitimacy, through you, I suppose—carried you off. I took the opportunity to leave. I wanted to reflect and think—then act. I could not stay long away; and time had weighed so heavily on me whilst we were apart, and I moreover saw you so pale on returning, that I resolved to make no more such trials. A change came over you, then. You wrapped yourself up in your woman's pride; not repelling, but disdaining to seek. I guessed why, and when I perceived the change a word or look could produce, I asked myself what other girl of eighteen would blush, smile, and look more lovely, because I was near. Oh! it is a dangerous thing for a man to meet daily a woman by whom he knows himself loved; dangerous even if she be plain, and perilous indeed when nature has made her lovely.

"There must assuredly be something very pleasant in the memory of that time, since I have thus allowed myself to be led on. Surely I need say no more, and your fears and doubts are allayed? I have shown you how and why I love you; I am of no inconstant temper; but though I have never been the first to change towards those whom I once loved, I know that vows have no power over the heart. They can bind us to duties, not, alas! to feelings. Would you charm me for ever, then be for ever what you are to-day. Mind, I speak not of beauty, but of that soft yet subtle spell which I felt in our first meeting, when you stood before me modest, fearless, and met my look with a frankness so bewitching, and, forgive me for saying it, so rare in woman. Oh! Nathalie, do not break that spell by doubt or mistrust. When we wish to drink of some pure draught, and to behold ourselves as we once have been, we do not seek the troubled stream which has made its way among the haunts of men, but the young, pure, and clear waters hidden in the quiet valley, and which have, as yet, only reflected the serene summer sky. You are to me that pleasant and cooling draught; my soul, long parched with this world's turmoil and fever, turns towards you, and delights in your purity and freshness. For heaven's sake, do not seek to be too wise, or to taste too early of the bitter cup of experience. Oh! if you can, keep your soul as fresh as the pure bloom on your cheek."

Rose, after having attentively read this letter, folded it up and silently handed it to her sister.

"Well," said Nathalie, eagerly looking up into her face, "he loves me, does he not?"

"Yes, he loves you."

"Then why look so grave?"

"Because, alas! this grave, wise Monsieur de Sainville loves you so unwisely."

Rose spoke sadly; but a bright triumphant smile lit up the features of Nathalie.

"Unwisely!" she echoed; "let him, Rose. Yes, let him, so sedate and so grave, submit to this folly of the heart? Come, what else do you object to?"

"To his loving you with so much passion, and therefore with so little reason," replied Rose, with unaltered seriousness.

"Passion! what do you know about passion, Rose? And yet you know many things. How can you tell that he loves me thus? What was it in his letter made you think so?"

"Every thing. Oh! child, he does not love you as a man should love his wife, as the future companion of his existence, the future mother of his children, but as a man loves his mistress. Do not look so indignant! I feel quite confident that you will be his legal wife; but will you be his wife in the true and holy sense of that word? He is fond of you; he will be prodigal of gifts to her he loves; it will be his delight to be near her and feel that she is his; to provoke her—she is easily provoked—and soothe her again, an art which he seemingly possesses, and is well conscious of possessing; he will have kind words and kinder caresses. But she will only be his toy, his plaything; the charm of his light hours, not his companion and friend. Not her with whom he would take the great journey of immortality; the being to guide in the path of right; to check from wrong. What does he mean by asking you to remain as you are? Does not the mind grow old? Lie not life's saddest knowledge and most bitter thoughts often hid beneath the clear brow of youth? Must not the truest heart lose its first purity and early freshness long before it may cease to beat? And I who thought that he would love you with a quiet, fatherly affection! But time it seems has not that power over the heart, its passions, feelings, and desires, which I fancied. The folly of youth can survive the teaching of experience, and passion be strong, despite all the might and wisdom of years."

"Oh! Rose," exclaimed her sister, "your words delight and torture me. His plaything! that was cruel; yet you are compelled to confess that he loves me—yes, 'despite all the might and wisdom of years.'"

"Does that please you? Be content, then; for I believe his love to be deeper than he hinted, than you believe, than he himself suspects. I had heard that when men like him gave themselves up to passion, they yielded to it more blindly than in youth; but I hoped that he was not of those. There must indeed be a strange spell on him, since he loves your very faults. He is blind now. Oh! Nathalie, give him not reason to waken as from a dream of folly."

Nathalie smiled at her sister with a bright trusting smile, which made her look very lovely, and yet it was not the smile of conscious youth and beauty.

"I have no spell save love," she said, "but that is a good one. Oh, Rose! I will love him so very much, and so very faithfully, that, faulty as I am, he must needs love me for ever. He likes me so; ask me not to change."

"Is he your conscience?" asked Rose, with mournful severity. "Oh! my child, my child: I fear for you. For, after folly, comes injustice. Why does he encourage you in your faults? Inexperience is not a merit; the fault of giving hasty replies ought not to be attractive to a wise man. You are capable of ardent affection, of devotedness, courage, and, if need were, heroism; for you are a brave little creature. For him, no danger would scare, no misery would make you faint-hearted. You can love fervently—let him prize that. You may lose your beauty, your freshness of feeling, your *piquant* vivacity, you will not lose your generous nature and warm heart. Do not persist in your faults and weaknesses to please him; he will be the first to quarrel with them. He will ask you to be gentle, submissive, and quiet. He is stern and severe; he will complain of your rebellious temper—nay, who knows even whether that very liveliness which now so much charms, will not end by wearying him? Well, what is it?" she added, seeing that Nathalie buried her face in her hands, and burst into a flood of passionate tears.

"Oh! Rose, you are pitiless!" exclaimed the young girl, looking up, her whole face flushed and agitated, her eyes glistening, her lips trembling with emotion; "yes, pitiless! else how could you even hint that he might end by wearying of me! God help me! All who have any affection for me, utter the same doubts, and tell me the same bitter story about love and life. It is all disappointment, folly, and regret. This is very cruel. The faith of youth should not be so pitilessly blighted; experience can do it no greater wrong than thus to depress it. Give me, if you can, the cold wisdom that comes with years; and, if you cannot, oh.! let me remain foolish if you will, but hopeful and trusting."

She paced the room up and down with much emotion, then suddenly stopped short, shook away her tears, and smiled.

"Why, how foolish I am!" she said, laughing at her folly; "how very foolish! You are good, Rose; you mean well; but what do you know about all this? If, from mere words written on a cold page, you already think that he loves me too well, what would you say if you had seen him bending a face, flushed and agitated with emotion, over her whom he calls his own Petite? If you had heard him, in a voice tremulous with ill-repressed feeling, telling her how much, how very much he loved her? Oh! Rose; you could then no more doubt him than I do," she added, after a pause, and speaking in her fervent and thrilling tones of triumphant faith.

She looked so proudly handsome, standing thus in the centre of the ill-lit room, with the light of youth's fervent hope in her eyes, and its radiant smile on her lips, that Rose forgot her wisdom, and exclaimed admiringly:

"I wish he saw you now."

Nathalie laughed, and shook her head.

"I know what you mean, Rose; but it is not that I trust to, it is not that. Listen," she added, taking her sister's hand, and pressing it to her heart; "I feel here a love which can subdue all his indifference and all his pride. Let him love me as he likes: as friend, companion, mistress, or wife, I care not; but he shall, he must love on. I tell you I know his love is deep and true; besides," she added, laying her forefinger on her forehead, and speaking in a lower tone, "I shall try——"

"What?" cried Rose.

"Nothing," replied Nathalie, with a smile.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Nathalie was meditating experiments—always dangerous things; in her case doubly dangerous. Her first experiment was very mild. She laughingly repeated to Monsieur de Sainville the substance of the remarks made by Rose. He did not seem offended, but was evidently annoyed. He frowned and fidgetted on his seat.

"Your sister means well," said he, "and she is very properly anxious about your happiness; but she is completely in error. Women neither know nor understand the sort of affection a man feels; it is that mistake which often makes them and their husbands so very wretched. They have on that subject the most extraordinary scruples and whims which it is possible to conceive. Be wiser than your sex. Ask not too curiously how and why you are loved. Love is not a theme to be demonstrated. All that a woman has a right to require of a man is that he should feel a true and honorable affection; but to wish to know according to what exact manner and measure he loves her, is to carry the Evelike spirit of analysis and inquiry rather far."

"But Rose says that my quick temper will vex and weary you," urged Nathalie, with a keen look.

"Oh! does she?" he replied, stroking her hair, with a smile.

He said no more; but Nathalie did not like his smile; it was kind, but perfectly secure. She thought it implied a quiet consciousness of that superior mind and will, which give to the possessor the power of subduing temper, and enforcing obedience; a power she had so often seen exercised by Monsieur de Sainville on all around him. She felt nettled at the security he manifested. "Does he imagine," she thought, "that he can sway me as he likes, and that I shall not so much as have the power of disturbing that unruffled calmness of his?"

She found a dangerous pleasure in the idea of convincing Monsieur de Sainville that such was not the case; that when she was concerned, he was not quite so much master of his feelings as he seemed to imagine. For a while indeed she confined herself to the wish, and matters went on very smoothly; but courtships are proverbially stormy, and though that of Monsieur de Sainville was at first made up of dew and sunshine—

morning storms are rare—yet as it progressed and reached its noon, the clouds which had long been threatening, suddenly broke forth.

Monsieur de Sainville had been romantic in youth, but he was so no longer. He loved Nathalie more than she thought, more than he would have cared to confess, but not, to say the truth, very poetically. He beheld in her no divinity, but a most enchanting mortal; no ideal being, but a delightful girl, whose youth, beauty, vivacity, and warm heart were a sufficiently charming reality not to need the illusions of fancy. The affectionate familiarity of his addresses showed exactly the nature of his feelings, and also made Nathalie feel that her sister's definition of his love was on the whole sufficiently correct.

He evidently looked forward with mingled impatience and pleasure to the time when she should be his wife. Every thing in Sainville now bore a reference to her presence, taste and habits. He even spoke once or twice of her attire, and pleased himself with the idea "that strings of pearls would look very well in her hair." That he loved her very much; that he was charmed at the prospect of having her ever near him; that he wished to gratify and indulge her as far as his power went; that he felt proud of her grace and beauty, was clear to Nathalie, but this was not all she had hoped for. She had hoped that the affection he felt for her would change Monsieur de Sainville in many things, whereas, with all his kindness and affection to her, he evidently remained unaltered in every other respect. She felt that though she had entered within the circle in which it was his pleasure to seclude himself, she had not the power of drawing him forth, or of summoning any other by her side; it had opened for her, but it had also closed again. And yet love was said to be all-powerful. Had he passed the age when its spells work? bitter, yet inevitable thought! She once fancied "all would be right if I only knew him well. He is a mystery of which I have just read the first few pages, no more." She often gazed on his calm countenance still striving to read the true meaning of its pale and marble-like repose. Once when he caught her eager look fastened on him, he seized her hands, held them firmly in one of his, threw back his hair, bent forward, and, compelling her to look him full in the face, more closely perhaps than observation strictly needed, he said quietly,

"Look and satisfy yourself once for all; for you have been examining me very curiously of late, Petite."

"Oh, sir," she thought, but she did not say so, "let me know you once for all, and you shall not catch me looking again so readily."

Thinking the opportunity good, however, she began questioning him on various subjects. Amongst other things, she wished to know why he had delayed explanation so long.

"Not through caprice or unbecoming vanity," he replied, "but because at my years a bitter knowledge has replaced the impatience of youth; because I have learned to know that the hope of happiness is often the truest happiness we can possess; that the purest joy is never so pure as its desire. Do you remember that day when we met in the green-house, and afterwards walked together? When we came to the recess of the sleeping nymph, the words that should have revealed all were on my lips; they remained unuttered. Why so? We stood on that spot where, many years before, I had spoken of love to Lucile; her image pale, lovely, and frail, rose before me. You were young and fair like her; like her would you too prove a weak and faithless woman? For a moment—only a moment, Petite—I gave you up, and ridiculed the weakness which seemed on the verge of deluding me again. Should I, in my manhood's maturer years, be mocked by the phantom of a passion which I had sworn to be only a phantom, even in the fervor of my youth? Compassion for my sick sister, who had set her heart on having Charles heir of my wealth and name, had previously kept me silent, and made me delay—imprudently. At first I thought she saw nothing—but women have a strange tact for detecting those things. I once gave her an opportunity of learning the truth from me; she shrank from it with terror. When she sent for Charles, I resolved to show no mercy, but she forestalled me, by declaring that she wished you to marry her son. I could not in honor seek to supplant my own nephew; besides, I felt quite confident you would refuse him. I knew, moreover, you would not have long to wait; after you had left the library, the doctor confirmed the belief. I felt much saddened. It was not for the intriguing Madame Marceau that I mourned, but for Rosalie, the sister of my youth. I confess that her perfidy—a perfidy to which you fell victim, my poor, candid child—enabled me to bear her loss with due philosophy; and yet, in her last hours, she either repented or despaired, for she told me all, and made me promise never to abandon her son."

"What do you call all?" quickly asked Nathalie.

"Her various and very useless schemes."

"And nothing else?"

"Why yes, Petite; she added that you had confessed to her a sort of liking for her brother."

Nathalie colored deeply.

"Then why," she asked, a little indignantly, "that disagreeable interview with her son?"

"Impossible to help it. He declared to me you were actually his betrothed; his plan was to have this understood, and then reject you. For I believe that he ended by hating you very cordially. It was necessary to prove to him that I knew such was not the case, and to defeat at once his kind scheme. You had been very cruelly used, my poor child, and I wished to avenge you."

"On whom?" asked Nathalie, smiling.

"On every one; ah, even on Amanda, if she had presumed to be impertinent. What! did she, indeed?" he added, noticing the expression which came over Nathalie's features.

"Oh, no."

"But your look says yes."

"No; only I remember the evening when she came for the vinaigrette."

"You mean when she came to see what had brought Monsieur de Sainville back to the room where Mademoiselle Montolieu was sitting alone. My poor child, Amanda was not to blame. Do you think Madame Marceau said to her, 'you shall be a spy on my brother, and on this young girl with whom he is in love.' No, verily. She said, 'Amanda, I have left my vinaigrette below.' The thing lay on the table opposite Amanda, but she understood the duties of her place too well to see it. She went down, looked about, went up again, and declared that both monsieur and mademoiselle had aided her in her useless search. The mistress learned what she wished to know; the attendant told what she had been sent to discover; the thing was over. Of course the vinaigrette was discovered at once, with many exclamations of surprise that it should not have been seen before. What, if for this, and other little services, the mistress chose to make her *femme-de-chambre* a present? Had she not a perfect right to do so?"

His careless tone could not hide the sarcasm lurking beneath it.

"How do you know all this?" asked Nathalie, looking up into his face with sorrowful surprise.

"Very simply; I have not lived so many years amongst men and women without knowing the ways of deceit, great and small. I also know that there is this much virtue left in humanity: what is done remorselessly is rarely confessed in open speech. But surely you do not feel any resentment for that poor Amanda, who was naturally anxious not to lose a good place. You have, I am sure, forgiven my unhappy sister her treachery, forgive also the helpless agent."

"Very well," abstractedly said Nathalie, who was no longer thinking about Amanda; "are you forgiving?" she suddenly added.

"Not remarkably so," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with a peculiar smile.

"And yet you seem to take every little treachery so much as a matter of course."

"Habit," he laconically answered.

"Then you are not forgiving?"

"Neither forgiving nor forgetful, Petite."

"Then you are vindictive?"

"Not precisely; since, if I never have yet to my knowledge forgotten an insult, I cannot say, however, that I have revenged a wrong."

"Because you are so generous," said she, brightening.

He shook his head in token of denial, but she persisted, "It must be generosity."

"And why not disdain, Petite?" he asked quietly.

Her countenance fell.

"My poor child," he gently resumed, "you think in your candor, that people still love and hate in this world. Well, they do, but how rarely. Hatred! there is not energy enough left for it in our civilized society. You, with your warm southern blood, might experience the feeling, but the mass know nothing of it; they give themselves up to petty spites, and contemptible animosities. Moralists talk of passions; there are no passions now save the meaner ones; the others perished ages back. But we will not speak of all this."

Nathalie gave him a mournful look. Was this his creed? And yet he did not look sad. No passions! then there were deep feelings!

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she involuntary exclaimed, "what is life?"

Some of the skeptics who hold Monsieur de Sainville's creed say a "jest;" but he took a nobler and more courageous view and gravely answered: "A duty."

Hard, however, is that lesson when it first falls in all its reality upon the ear of ardent youth. If not long before, Nathalie had been called upon to give the definition she now asked of her lover, she would, in the fervor of her love and of her hopeful nature, have replied: "A delight."

Ay, a delight; for enchanting and delicious are the promises of passion, and Eden itself never seemed more fair to newly awakened Eve than the lovely scenes and glimpses life had opened to the enraptured gaze of Nathalie. The trance is generally brief; the next phase is the despairing doubt, succeeded by disgust of all things, or the calm resignation which teaches to endure patiently; but this was a bitter lesson the young girl had never expected to learn from her lover, and which Monsieur de Sainville had been far from wishing to teach. His evident skepticism depressed her greatly.

"I was not always thus," he resumed, "I, too, have had the faith and divine dreams of youth. We all of us, more or less, enter active life in the spirit of knight-errantry; to struggle, subdue, and win. Oh! the glorious hopes that usher us in; the dreams, the visions that enchant this first journey, the sylvan shades, the summer bowers, the adventurous wilds, and caverns deep—these, too, have their charm of danger—that lie before us! But, alas! the dreary time when we see the path we must tread as it really is; a barren waste. Then, indeed, for dangers to brave, and a struggle to win!"

"And this is life!" said Nathalie, with deep sadness.

"The life of many; not of all; your's, Petite, shall know nothing of all this. The sun shall gladden, and the shade shelter you still; yes, when you wish."

He spoke affectionately, and Nathalie understood the implied promise of happiness. But she could not chase away the thought:

"Oh! why is he so skeptical? why have I no power over him for good?"

He had left her, and she was sitting at the feet of Aunt Radegonde, as she again felt this ever-renewing desire.

"Do you know, child, a thing I have observed of late?" said the Canoness, with the suddenness familiar to persons of slow perception when they happen to be struck with something.

"No," abstractedly said Nathalie, "what is it?"

"Why, Armand is so much changed."

"How so?" asked Nathalie, looking up, with immediate interest.

"I can scarcely tell, and yet he seems changed, since the death of our poor Rosalie. He does not seem so cold and so severe as he was; there is about him something more gentle, and more kind. He was very much attached to Rosalie. It is her death that has affected him thus."

"But are you sure, quite sure of it?" asked Nathalie, in a low tone.

"My dear child, you are very simple. Does my penetration ever deceive me? Well, what is it?" she asked, as Nathalie rose, and twining her arms around her neck, kissed her repeatedly; "you are a dear child, no doubt, but why do you kiss me?"

"Because you have made me so happy," replied Nathalie, who felt enchanted.

But the very next day destroyed the hopeful dreams in which she had already been indulging. She found Aunt Radegonde in a very discontented mood.

"It was the old story again," she said, pettishly. "Armand, after being so good and indulgent, that he forgave, without even a word, the foolish gardener who had allowed his finest and most expensive plants to die away, was now dismissing Jean, a poor lad of eighteen, no one so much as knew why."

"Is Monsieur de Sainville quite determined?" asked Nathalie.

"Of course he is, Petite; I tell you he is in one of those moods, when neither heaven nor earth could move him. I saw it in his face; and you know if I am ever deceived in those matters. It is the story of André over again, only that this time there is no mistake, and that Jean must go."

Nathalie looked thoughtful, and slightly excited. She was meditating an experiment destined to test her power, or rather her influence, over Monsieur de Sainville. She soon found a pretence to leave Aunt Radegonde in the garden, where they were then both sitting, and lightly ran up the lime-tree avenue, leading to the library. She met Monsieur de Sainville in the act of coming out.

"Where were you running so fast?" he asked, stopping her.

"To look for you," she quickly replied.

"Indeed," he answered, looking pleased, and drawing her arm within his.

"Yes, I want to ask you for something."

"Ah! otherwise you would not come running for me Pray, what is it?"

"A favor."

"Wonderful! A favor? Can your pride actually stoop thus far?"

"Yes, if you will grant it."

"It must be something very unreasonable, or utterly impossible, if I refuse."

She stopped short, and looked up at him fixedly. There was nothing like refusal in the pleased and yet surprised expression of his face. She smiled, and said, after a pause:

"Forgive poor Jean."

The brow of Monsieur de Sainville became suddenly overcast.

"That," said he, gravely, "is unfortunately impossible."

"Impossible!" she exclaimed.

"Would I refuse you, otherwise?"

"Then you refuse me?"

"I must."

"She colored, and made a movement to leave her position by his side, but restraining herself, she said:

"He is a civil lad."

He did not reply.

"And his mother is a very poor widow."

"And you have been very kind to her," he said. "I know where her cottage stands; I know that you have gone in there, often; never empty-handed, and yet you are not rich, Petite."

"Those who are rich, do not always give most," she replied, with some asperity.

"Is that a hint to me? Well, if I have been remiss, you shall be my almoner; people will apply more readily to you, than to me, for nature has bestowed on you the face of one to whom it is a joy to give."

"And to ask," replied Nathalie, with significance, that showed she was not to be diverted from her object.

"Ask me for any thing else," he said, soothingly; "ask me to give any thing you like to Jean's mother."

He spoke in a tone so earnest, that it struck her.

"Why do you dismiss him?" she asked.

"He has failed in his duty."

"Disobeyed, I suppose; for that I believe is what you never forgive."

"No it was not disobedience."

"Well then, what did he do?"

"Take my word for it, that lad has deserved to lose his place."

"Forgive him, for my sake!"

She spoke in her softest and most winning tones; and looked up into his face with a beseeching glance. He seemed embarrassed, but replied:—

"I assure you it grieves me to refuse you this"

"Then you will not forgive him?"

"I cannot."

"And you will not say why you dismiss him?"

He remained silent.

Nathalie drew away from him with flushed cheeks and kindling glance.

"You are a tyrant!" she exclaimed.

He turned very pale; with him the sign of deepest anger. But she heeded it not, she heeded not the darkening frown and compressed lips; she was thoroughly angered and reckless, and entered the house in her most indignant mood, resolved to leave it that very instant. In the hall she met Jean, the dismissed servant; acting on the impulse of the moment, as usual, she emptied her purse—it was not a very heavy one—into his hand, and said, in a quick, excited tone, "This is for your mother, Jean; I am very sorry you are going."

He looked very much disconcerted.

"Mademoiselle is truly good," he said, hesitatingly, "and I am sure she has always been so kind to my mother, that I feel—but I can assure mademoiselle, monsieur was quite mistaken when he thought the remark he overheard me making to André was intended as disrespectful to her."

"A remark about me!" exclaimed Nathalie, much surprised.

"I thought mademoiselle knew," answered Jean, looking much more disconcerted than before.

"I am sorry to have been the cause of your dismissal," she quietly answered, and slowly returned to the garden.

This then explained why Monsieur de Sainville had refused her request as well as an explanation, which could not but hurt her feelings; and she had called him a tyrant! She felt she could not be happy until she had asked him to forgive her.

She found him walking with his aunt in the garden. He looked grave, almost stern, and took no notice of her approach. Nathalie detected the anxious glance which the Canoness cast on them both. "What shall I say to him?" she thought.

Aunt Radegonde lingered behind, and signed Nathalie to come to her.

"Petite," she whispered anxiously, "what has happened? I have not seen him looking so—no, not for years."

But Nathalie had seen him thus before. Yes, on the day when Madame Marceau repeated to him that doubt on his honor, which she had uttered in a moment of despair, he looked thus.

She gave the Canoness no reply; there was a fear at her heart which she would not confess, even to herself, and yet her look anxiously followed Monsieur de Sainville, who walked on before them, without once looking round.

"Go and speak to him," whispered the Canoness.

"And say, like a naughty child:—I shall do it no more," disdainfully replied Nathalie. "No, Marraine, I cannot do that."

"Do something, Petite. I am sure you were in the wrong, by your look. Go and walk by him."

"And wait until his lordship chooses to look down on his handmaiden! No."

"Then go and take his arm. You are so reserved with him usually, that he must be desperately angry indeed if he does not consider this a great favor."

Nathalie could not repress a smile, but this, being the most daring counsel, pleased her best; she accordingly walked on and very deliberately took the arm of Monsieur de Sainville. His anger was probably of the deepest dye, for though he submitted to this advance, suggested by the feminine diplomacy of his aunt, who anxiously watched the result, he neither turned nor looked towards Nathalie. Offended in her turn, she made a motion to withdraw, but he quickly detained her. She gave him a furtive glance; he looked as morose as ever, but she smiled to herself and thought, "You may look as cross as you like; but you are not so very angry after all."

"I have been very hasty," she said very demurely, "will you forgive me?"

She looked up; not one of his stern features had relaxed, nor did he seem in the least mollified by her concession.

"For what are you apologizing?" he coldly asked.

"For my inconsiderate language," replied Nathalie, somewhat surprised at his continued gravity. He did not answer; she resumed: "I am aware that I was wholly in the wrong. I know your motive for dismissing Jean and refusing to forgive him, as well as if you were to tell me."

The countenance of Monsieur de Sainville darkened considerably.

"I understand," said he, frigidly, "you apologize because it is proved to you that you were in the wrong."

"And if it were not proved to me that I was in the wrong, how could I apologize?" asked Nathalie, who was getting impatient.

"You could if you only entertained for me a feeling you evidently do not entertain; confidence in my justice and honor."

He spoke with so much severity, and had evidently been so deeply hurt by her conduct, that Nathalie could not restrain her tears. He seemed touched by her emotion, and immediately said in a gentler tone:

"Do not think me offended at a few hasty words, however harsh, uttered in a moment of passion. You have a quick temper. I can forgive that; I will bear any thing from you save mistrust; that I seldom suffer from any one, and never where I love as I love you, with all the strength and energy of my nature."

He spoke vehemently, as if carried away by the impulse of the moment, and with a force of passion that made the heart of Nathalie beat rapturously. She forgot her mistrust and his anger; she only saw and felt that he loved her as she longed to be loved. "Oh!" she thought inwardly, "I did well to provoke him, since it has led to this."

Aunt Radegonde now came up; she looked at them both anxiously; the traces of tears still lingered on Nathalie's cheek.

"Armand," uneasily said the Canoness, "she is a child, a mere child, do not forget it."

Without answering her, Monsieur de Sainville looked at Nathalie and smiled.

"I must surely be a domestic tyrant," he said, in a low key, "else would my good aunt recommend you to my tender mercies in this flattering tone?"

"No, you are no tyrant," quickly replied Nathalie; "I shall never forgive myself that odious word."

"Forgive yourself, but do not mistrust me again."

"Never!" she exclaimed, placing her hand in his, and feeling, as she did so, that she had never loved him so truly and so fervently as at that moment. It seemed as if her old love had all at once returned; not the troubled, exacting feeling which had of late filled her heart, but the mingled affection and reverence with which she had formerly regarded him and which had made her say to her sister: "I could pass thus through life, sitting at his feet and listening to his teaching."

The Canoness in her well-meant zeal contributed to destroy this good impression.

"Oh, Petite!" she exclaimed, as soon as they were alone, "how glad I am it is all over, and how anxious I felt! Not for years had I seen him look so. I know his face better than you do. What can you have done to vex him? Never do it again; no, for heaven's sake, do not!"

Nathalie smiled without answering.

Aunt Radegonde resumed, "I remember well, it was just so he looked on the day he broke with Lucile. Oh! he is a harsh man. Do not provoke him. My poor child had always more fear than love for him in her heart."

"But I have not!" exclaimed Nathalie, with something like pride, "I love and do not fear."

"Be not too confident, you foolish child," almost angrily said the Canoness; "and if, as I believe, you do love him, why then do not provoke and lose him for ever."

Nathalie smiled without answering. Her look said: "You warn and threaten me in vain. He loves me, I know it; he shall bear with me, ay, and his judgment shall yield to my caprice many a time."

It was plain Aunt Radegonde understood, for she shook her head, and gave the young girl a look of sorrowful reproach as she merely said: "Petite!"

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CHAPTER XXIX.

Nathalie had discovered that she possessed the power of vexing Monsieur de Sainville, and she made good use of the discovery. It was by no means vanity that led her to act thus; but a sort of tormenting and experimental curiosity which was, indeed, her Eve-like and besetting sin. She felt, moreover, in indulging her caprices, the dangerous pleasure youth finds in a peril braved and overcome—the pleasure which, when she wandered as a child on the outskirts of the Pyrenees, had made her follow a narrow ledge of rock by a precipice, in preference to the smooth and open road, even though her heart beat all the time with secret fear. In the same spirit, she now wandered amongst the rocky recesses and dangerous parts of her lover's temper, proceeding to the very verge of his displeasure, then, as if frightened at her own daring, suddenly retreating, soon to return again, lured on by an irresistible temptation.

Monsieur de Sainville had too much penetration not to see through her design; but as Nathalie forbore from manifesting those doubts of his honor which he resented so keenly, he was only amused by her hasty and pettish ways; he felt like the possessor of a beautiful wild bird, who philosophically endures the creature's wilfulness for the sake of its bright plumage and delightful song—nay, who will even indulge it in its farthest flight, knowing well the charm to lure it back and subdue at once all its wildness and pride.

Indeed, this variable temper, which would have alarmed another man, only rendered Nathalie more seductive to Monsieur de Sainville. He had from the first been charmed by the truth and vivacity with which she yielded to every impulse and impression of the moment; and the charm was on him still, for it is one over which time and habit have little power. Once or twice, indeed, he asked himself how this changeful April humor of mingled storm and sunshine, so delightful for the pleasure day of courtship, would answer for the long sober journey of marriage; but the doubt never lasted beyond a moment; he knew that his betrothed loved him with her whole heart, and he knew also that his will was one not easily resisted. "When the moment comes," he thought, "I can subdue her temper, which will be only right; but to break it, and with it all her light, innocent vivacity, would be odious." This comfortable reflection enabled Monsieur de Sainville to bear with great equanimity and good humor the trials to which Nathalie put his patience; and here, accordingly, is the place to mention a contradiction in the character of the young girl which it might have puzzled any metaphysician to account for: she would have been in despair had she succeeded in offending Monsieur de Sainville, but she felt sadly vexed to have failed; the more so as an odd and significant smile in which he indulged now and then, disconcerted her greatly. She was on the verge of submitting quietly and giving up the point, when the opportunity she had sought for in vain offered itself unexpectedly.

The recent death of his sister had prevented Monsieur de Sainville from pressing Nathalie on the subject of their marriage, but when a sufficient time had elapsed to justify a quiet ceremony, he gravely asked her to fix a day. She cooly replied there was no hurry; he urged the point—she still said there was no hurry; he remonstrated—she remained unmoved; he insisted—she refused. Monsieur de Sainville was not accustomed to contradiction; he felt much surprised, annoyed, and offended at the persistent refusals of Nathalie. As she would not explain herself, he attributed her conduct to coquetry and caprice. Unused to obstacles he could not surmount, he now felt it strange and provoking that the whim of a girl,—even though she was the being he most loved—should stand between him and his will. Nay, the fact of her being his future wife, rather increased than lessened her offence.

Rose felt equally annoyed at her sister's obstinacy, and repeatedly urged her to lay by her objections and scruples.

"Your present position is awkward and unbecoming," she said, very seriously.

"I do not care about that," was the impatient answer; "I only wish I could delay this marriage for ever."

"Why so?" very gravely asked her sister.

"Because, since it seems agreed by every one that love is only a sort of dream, a fever, heaven knows what, I would, if I could, prolong its brief existence, and awaken as late as possible, Rose."

Rose vainly endeavored to remove this feeling; her sister reminded her of all she had formerly said about the brevity and delusions of passion.

"Well, then," replied Rose, with sudden decision, "do better still, since you are convinced his love will not last: that it is only passion and caprice have drawn him towards you, give him up; have the courage to relinquish him at once!"

Nathalie turned pale.

"Oh! Rose," she said bitterly, "you are, indeed, pitiless; do you not see I cannot do that; that I love him; that come what will, my being has now become linked with his?"

"Then marry him now and relieve him—relieve yourself from a painful position."

"A little longer, Rose; a little longer.'

"Oh! child, if you care for his love, be wise, and seek to keep it by some other method than coquetry or caprice."

"Alas! it is not coquetry or caprice," sorrowfully replied

Nathalie, "it is fear, a fear that makes me very unhappy. Oh! why is he so skeptical? Why did he let me see it? Why did he not deceive me? Happy are the deceived women; happy if they only knew it! It is true I questioned him, for there is a ceaseless tormenting sort of desire in our hearts to know that which is to make us wretched, and I dare say I questioned him closely. I wanted to know, but then I did not imagine—how could I?—that the truth was so very bitter. There is a pitiless frankness and honesty about him; he will tell the truth, however harsh and cruel it may be; if you do not wish to know it, do not ask; if you ask, do not expect he will deceive you. I believe he is truly attached to me; I cannot but believe it, and yet he will not take the engagement of loving me for ever as he does now. He will always have a true affection for me, he says; but that is not what I ask, and he declares that the feeling I mean is independent of the will. I know that my refusal to fix the time of our marriage has offended him deeply, and yet I can—not help it. When he is cold and distant now, I can say to myself: 'it is anger;' but when he is cold after I have become his wife, I shall say, 'it is indifference.' Better, ten times better, his anger than his indifference, Rose."

Thus Nathalie reasoned, and accordingly persisted in her conduct; but in the meanwhile a very painful feeling of estrangement had arisen between her and Monsieur de Sainville; they met coldly and very rarely alone, for they no longer took advantage of the opportunities which the good-natured Canoness had willingly afforded them; neither, indeed, felt happy, yet neither would take the first step that might lead to a reconciliation, which, from there being no open breach, had become very difficult. The arguments of Rose at length induced Nathalie to promise her sister that whenever Monsieur de Sainville might mention the subject of their marriage again, she would consent without objection; but he unfortunately could not know this, and as his pride still suffered from the repulses he had sustained, he maintained on that point a proud and haughty silence. Nathalie felt deeply offended, she construed his reserve into an open and direct insult, and bitterly declared it was meant to mortify her and give her a lesson. In order to show how much she resented this supposed intention, she chose for visiting Aunt Radegonde the days and hours when she knew Monsieur de Sainville to be away or engaged; left at the time of his return, and avoided him so studiously that they were once ten days without meeting. Such had been the case, and Monsieur de Sainville was away as usual, when she called on Aunt Radegonde one afternoon. She found her sitting alone at the end of the lime-tree avenue, looking sad and thoughtful.

"I begin to think," said the Canoness, very drearily, "that this marriage will never take place, and that you will never come back here, Petite; matters are not going on well between you and Armand; no, not at all well. Do you know I begin to think it was a mistake all along, and that you now begin to find out you never liked him as much as you thought."

"Oh! no," sorrowfully said Nathalie: "no, Marraine, the mistake is not there; it is he cares less and less for me every day; I, alas! like him but too well, ay, and more than ever.'

She buried her face in her hands, and wept bitterly.

"My child, my poor child!" exclaimed the Canoness, much distressed, "do not cry so, I am sure it is only a mistake."

"And why should there be a mistake at all?" said the voice of Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie looked up with sudden terror, and turned very pale, as she beheld him standing before her. He looked grave, and had evidently overheard her. She did not reply.

"Why should there be a mistake at all?" he repeated, sitting down by her side.

She did not answer or look towards him; a burning blush was gradually settling over her features. She felt mortified, vexed, and yet happy, for she knew that the cloud was at length broken.

"Yes," eagerly said the Canoness, "why should there be a mistake at all? Why not have that which would remove all such mistakes—a wedding, for instance," she shrewdly added, after a pause; "it would be a good remedy, Petite."

Nathalie did not reply.

"Petite rejects the remedy," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville.

"Indeed she does not," quickly rejoined his aunt. "It is very strange in you Armand, to say that. I am sure Petite is too sensible not to feel, not to know—in short, Petite will leave the matter for me as the head of the family to settle, will she not?" she added in her most coaxing tones.

Nathalie remained silent; her pride was undergoing a severe trial. If Monsieur de Sainville had not overheard her, she would not have felt it, but she had said she liked him better than ever, and now, whichever way she acted, she felt condemned to appear weak or capricious. He was looking at her calmly and attentively. His aunt was going to repeat her question: he prevented her.

"No, aunt, this privilege belongs to me."

"But, Armand," she said, a little stiffly, "I think that as head of the house——"

"Be kind enough to wave your right for once," he replied, very seriously.

"Well, for once I do not mind; but you understand, Armand, that when the head of the house happens to be a woman. those matters are generally left to her."

"Yes, aunt, I understand," he answered, a little impatiently. He addressed the Canoness. but kept looking at Nathalie.

The young girl understood this look, and she resolved to efface by the gravity of her consent, whatever sense of triumph in him, or mortification in her, it might create.

"It shall now be as you like," she said, very seriously, and meeting his look as she spoke.

There was a brief silence. Aunt Radegonde vainly compressed her lips to conceal her smile of triumph; for it was one of her weaknesses to imagine every favorable event in which she was even slightly concerned as the result of the most deeply-laid schemes and diplomacy on her part.

"It would have been a broken match without me and my managing," she shrewdly thought; and again looking at them both, she smiled openly; but a cloud soon came over her cheerful face. They sat side by side indeed, but with glances which if not averted from one another, were certainly not likely to meet; Monsieur de Sainville was looking at the sky before him; Nathalie's eyes were bent upon the ground at her feet; neither spoke, and yet, though the Canoness knew it not, they might then be as near and understand one another as well as in utter solitude. "It is an explanation they want," thought she.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she suddenly exclaimed aloud, "I have forgotten my knitting; only think of that, Armand; only think of that, Petite!"

She rose as she spoke thus, and alas! left them alone.

It was evening: the sun was setting fast; the blue of heaven was deepening at the zenith; but from the western horizon a flood of golden light poured over the garden and the surrounding grounds. The first days of summer had come, and the trees were all in their verdure and beauty; but in the warm light which now fell upon them, they seemed to have borrowed some of the rich hues of autumn; even the dark masses of evergreens in the background had caught a rosy flush from the setting sun, and the stately cedar rose against the blue sky, unstirred by a breath from heaven. Every thing spoke harmony, loveliness, and peace.

Monsieur de Sainville looked thoughtful.

"What is he going to say?" thought Nathalie, who felt her heart beating fast. It was now a long time since they had met thus alone. Nathalie was in a mood when the affections, and the affections alone, are easily swayed. With a few kind words her lover might have obtained any concession from her; she felt tired of rebellion; it would have gladdened her to submit, but to submit because her heart longed for it, certainly not because it was expedient, or even just. Unfortunately Monsieur de Sainville neither saw nor suspected this He concluded, as most men would have concluded in his place, that his coldness had given the young girl a somewhat severe but upon the whole a salutary lesson, and that for their mutual happiness it would be proper to keep this up a little longer. The temper of his future bride had of late given him some uneasiness. He began to think that he had been too indulgent; that he had mistaken her; that she was not so easily swayed as he had first imagined; above all, that their married life would require a greater display of will on his part than he had anticipated. Monsieur de Sainville liked to rule, but not to command. He wished his authority to be so well established, that whilst rebellion remained out of the question, every appearance of subjection should be carefully avoided. He would by no means deprive Nathalie of the wild grace which freedom gives—a grace which became her so well that it seemed her own peculiarity. Nay; he even liked her to resist his will, provided she ended by yielding. He wished his yoke to seem as light as it was firm in reality. But for this, it was necessary Nathalie should understand him plainly; at the same time this was not a thing easily put in words; therefore he hesitated. He spoke at length. The young girl had been abandoning herself to the soothing charm of the hour then

"Quiet as a nun
Breathless with admiration."

The divine peace of earth and sky seemed to have entered her heart. She felt as if this were the time for a happy reconciliation, and wondered how he would address her after a tacit quarrel of three weeks; and how he would excuse his coldness, and seek to soothe her wounded pride. He did neither; in gentle, though firm language, he proved to her that she had been much in the wrong; that they had both been unhappy; that such misunderstandings would render any married life miserable; that there was only one safe cure for such cases—authority on the side of the husband, and submission on that of the wife. Nathalie looked up incredulously into his face.

"Surely I have misunderstood you," she said; "you do not mean to say a woman must obey her husband!"

"I assure you such is my opinion," he seriously replied.

"Would you expect your wife to obey you?" she promptly asked.

"Under certain restrictions, I should."

He spoke without the least hesitation. Yet Nathalie looked up into his face with lingering doubt. "This is only a trial," she thought. He resumed:

"I do not understand by obedience a servile submission which it would be as degrading to exact as to yield; but that trust and confidence which induces a woman to submit, not blindly, but willingly, to the guidance of him to whom she has confided her destiny."

"I might agree with you if he were her father," coldly said Nathalie.

"A woman's husband ought to have all the authority of a father," gravely replied Monsieur de Sainville.

"And of a master, it would seem," bitterly exclaimed Nathalie, who on this subject had all the rebellious feelings of her sex.

"I am sorry you take this view of the subject," he calmly resumed. "I had hoped to convince you of the soundness of my views. You cannot but acknowledge that we have not of late been quite happy. No married life carried on in this spirit would be endurable. And why? Because you have refused to yield, when it would have been right to do so. Was I not justified in dismissing Jean, without forgiving him at your request, or entering into a painful explanation? Was I not equally justified in urging an immediate union, when delay led to such unpleasant consequences? You, unfortunately, had not confidence enough in me to recognize or admit this; there is but one possible remedy—your promise to yield to me for the future."

"And why should I yield?" impetuously asked Nathalie who felt much irritated at his coldness.

"Remember," he continued without answering, "that I speak not of servile submission, but of a noble feeling of confidence. It is impossible you should think I wish to play the tyrant with you. But remember the difference of our dispositions and our years. I love you with the authority and tenderness of a father. You are very young, and very heedless; you must be both my wife and my child."

"I will not," exclaimed Nathalie, stung by this promise of paternal affection. "I will not be your daughter, or yield you the obedience of one. I feel myself your equal; as such I will be treated."

He waited until she was less excited, then said, with a coolness that only seemed to increase as she lost her composure:

"I do not question our equality, I merely say that our positions will be different. What is the feeling that constitutes a happy marriage? Faith on either side: in man, as an entire faith in the love and truth of her he has chosen; in woman, as a boundless trust in the honor of her husband. I ask you to have that trust in me. You cannot imagine that under the pretence of authority I shall seek to interfere with every detail of your existence. If you do, indeed, you think me a tyrant in your heart, however much you may deny it with your lips. All I want is to be your guide and friend. Domestic strife is the bane of marriage; let us avoid it. Promise when our wills are at variance, that yours will yield to mine, not because I am your superior, but because my years and experience enable me to judge and decide better than you can."

All this might be very reasonable, but logic always chilled Nathalie. Unfortunately, those who loved her best never seemed aware that she thought with her heart. Monsieur de Sainville's cold language fell on her warm southern feelings like the icy breeze of some northern shore. "Oh, no," she thought, with a swelling heart, as her hopes of a happy reconciliation were thus dispelled. "No, he never has loved me, or he would not now speak so coldly!" and tears which she could not repress dimmed her eyes.

Monsieur de Sainville completely misunderstood her emotion. He thought she was yielding, but deploring at the same time the necessity of being obliged to yield.

"Is it possible," he asked, a little impatiently, "that the prospect of yielding up your will to mine now and then—for it would be no more—can shock you so much?"

Nathalie gave him a look of sorrowful reproach.

"I am not thinking of that," she sadly said, "but I am thinking that after being to me more distant than the merest stranger for three weeks, this cold wisdom is all you find to say now. Oh!" added she, in a low and beseeching tone, "if you do indeed wish me to obey you, ask me in some other way to do so, and I may perhaps subdue my pride so far; but do not try to prove to me that I must,—that it is a duty; that if I refuse, all happiness is gone. Oh! the heart has arguments worth all your logic. Say it is something you desire, and I will grant it without caring what or why."

Her voice trembled slightly as she spoke.

Monsieur de Sainville neither replied nor turned towards her, and yet he was not unmoved. Had he at that moment followed the impulse of his heart, he would have spoken very tenderly, nor uttered another word about that promise of obedience which it had cost him more to mention than Nathalie, from his calm manner, imagined. But he knew that if he now yielded to this impulse, it would be to repent it for ever, and he therefore firmly resisted it. Besides, in his cold and rigid honesty he would have scrupled to avail himself of a moment's yielding tenderness. "Poor child!" he thought, "she has a kind and affectionate heart; and yet I must wait until by-and-bye to tell her how dearly I prize it. For her own good, I must first convince her that it is right and necessary I should have a proper control over that stubborn little will and that flighty temper of hers.

"My dear child," said he, aloud, a little more kindly, but quite as coldly as before, "you mistake me; this is no matter of feeling; I do not appeal to your heart, but to your judgment; I do not wish to influence,—I wish to convince you."

Nathalie smiled bitterly. He spoke kindly, but she felt chilled and repelled; all her best feelings seemed thrown back upon her as weak and worthless things.

"Of what do you wish to convince me?" she asked, in a low tone.

"That for the sake of our mutual happiness it will be just that you should sometimes—I shall rarely claim the right—obey me."

Much in life depends upon a word. In spite of his unaltered coldness and inflexible tone, Nathalie might have yielded, but the word "obey" revolted her as a gratuitous insult. Her color rose, her look lost all at once its usual softness, and her very lips trembled with indignation as she cried vehemently,

"I will not obey you."

"Then you mistrust me," said he, with a frown. "You have no confidence in my justice; none in my honor. You think I would make an unworthy use of my power."

"I neither know nor care," disdainfully replied Nathalie, who now felt perfectly reckless; "but I declare to you that I will not obey you, or promise to do so."

She rose as she spoke thus with equal decision and energy. Monsieur de Sainville saw at once that his advantage was gone, but he would not stoop to compromise or utter a word to win back what he had lost. Theoretically, love may be all the pure gold of devotion; practically, it is alloyed with the meaner metal of other passions. In Monsieur de Sainville's case, it blended with pride and inflexible will. He rose also.

"Nathalie," said he, with a sort of angry calmness, which she knew well, "the happiness of our whole existence is at stake. I ask you once more, will you become my wife, and promise to obey me?"

Nathalie loved him, but she too was passionate and proud. Her color deepened as she replied, in broken tones:

"I understand you, and I reject your conditions. I will not become your wife if I may not be such without obeying you I release you from a tie which has of late become a burden to you; which perhaps was always so. Let us part; we are not fit for one another. You do not love me. You never loved me truly; and I feel I could not long love one who seeks not a wife but a slave."

Monsieur de Sainville became extremely pale; of that livid pallor which indicates repressed anger; but he said, in his coldest tones:

"Be it so."

He turned away as he spoke, without giving her time to recover, answer, or retract. She stood in the same spot, motionless as a statue, and well nigh as pale, listening to the sound of his receding steps on the gravel of the lime-tree avenue. At length the sound ceased; the library door had closed upon him.

Until then Nathalie did not seem to have the full consciousness of what had really happened; but that sound sent a strange pang through her heart; and all at once the thought that every thing was over, broke on her with a force so terrible and so awful, that it seemed to crush her. She sank down on the bench—the same on which they had both sat a few minutes back—conscious of nothing save his last words: "Be it so."

She bowed her head in her hands, and felt like those on whom the irrevocable sentence has been passed.

How long or how short a time she remained thus, Nathalie did not know. She was roused by a voice observing, close to her:

"Petite, why on earth do you stay here? The dew is falling."

The words reached her ear, but their meaning seemed vague and indistinct, like something heard in a dream. Yet she looked up. Evening was closing in; the lime-trees cast their deep shadow around her; the air was gray and chill; Aunt Radegonde stood before her. Even in this indistinct light, the Canoness was struck with the young girl's pallor and altered features.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she agitatedly exclaimed; "what has happened? Why are you here alone? Where is Armand?"

Nathalie looked at her drearily. "Where is Armand?" Oh, who would ever ask that question of her again, and when would she reply, "He is here," or "He is coming!"

"Petite!" beseechingly exclaimed the Canoness, "Oh! tell me what it is that has happened?"

Nathalie did not reply; she rose with an effort, put on her bonnet and scarf, which lay on the bench, then bent down, kissed the Canoness, and, in a low tone, dropped the words, "Good bye."

"No, not good bye; not good bye," cried Aunt Radegonde, very much agitated; "it is only good night; you go early, because your sister wants you; you will come back to-morrow; the day is fixed, I know. Come, Petite, do not be foolish; do not talk so"

"Good bye," again said Nathalie, in a low tone.

The poor Canoness sank down on the seat lately occupied by the young girl.

"I knew it," she cried; "yes, I knew it from the first. What has his love ever brought, save misery? Oh! he is a hard-hearted tyrant. God forgive him; God forgive him; I cannot."

She said no more, but burst into tears. Nathalie kissed her once more, and wished to turn away, but the Canoness pressed her to her bosom, and wept again.

"You will come and see me," she said.

Nathalie shook her head, and disengaged herself from her embrace without answering. Yet, before going, she gave one look to the scenes of so many joys and such bitter grief. Every thing looked vague and indistinct in the twilight, and the low sound of the little fountain alone disturbed the deep silence. Aunt Radegonde was sitting on the bench in a sorrowful and desolate attitude; her pale figure and wistful look ever came back to Nathalie, with the memory of that hour of sorrow.

She had passed through the garden, crossed the court, and entered the house. As she reached the passage leading to the hall, the library door opened, and Monsieur de Sainville came out. Nathalie recognized him by the light of the lamp, which fell full on his features. She could not retrace her steps without being heard, and therefore remained standing where she was, in the deep shadow of the staircase; but instead of going up to the drawing-room, as she thought he would, Monsieur de Sainville came precisely to the spot where she stood. He did not see her until they stood face to face. All the blood in Nathalie's frame rushed tumultuously to her heart; but she neither moved nor spoke. He, as pale, silent, and yet as agitated as the young girl, stood equally irresolute. At first, he seemed inclined to move on, but he suddenly changed his resolve; and, taking both her hands in his, drew her forward to the light, and looked at her fixedly. Before she could recover from the surprise into which this sudden act had thrown her, he had dropped her hands, opened the door leading to the court, and was gone.

For a few minutes, Nathalie remained motionless on the spot where he had left her. She remembered the evening when he had told her that he wanted to look at her, because he was going away for a fortnight; but then his look was not so sad, so grave, nor, alas! so brief.

Rose was in her room undressing when her sister entered it. One look at Nathalie's pale face told her all that had happened. She had long foreseen this, yet the shock made her turn pale, and drew from her an exclamation of sorrow; but she asked no explanation.

"I will tell you all some day," said Nathalie, in a low tone. "Be merciful, and do not question me now."

She sat down on a chair, and buried her face in her hands. She remained there for several hours, and would not go to bed until near daylight. When she at length laid down by the side of her sister, Rose half-raised herself on one elbow, and watched her anxiously. She was motionless, but evidently not asleep; the dull morning light added to the waxen pallor of her features; her hands lay folded on her bosom; her eyes were closed, but no tears stole from beneath the sealed eyelids. She never spoke once, nor did Rose address her: for the sorrow that will not reveal itself in words, language has no consolation.

Nathalie rose with her sister. It was early still, as the deep quietness of heaven and earth revealed. She opened the window, and unclosed the shutters, and sat down, leaning her brow against the iron bar of the little balcony. The rosy light of the rising sun fell on the old abbey and on the little churchyard beyond; the breeze was cool and pure; there was something holy in this quiet time. But its repose was lost on the young girl. Oh! how often will troubled human hearts quarrel with the eternal peace and loveliness of nature.

"You will get cold, if you sit thus in your nightdress," said Rose, closing the window as she spoke thus, chiefly for the purpose of extracting some reply; but Nathalie gave her none. She merely drew her chair near the table, and, with a pencil, began writing a few hurried lines on a slip of paper. Scarcely, however, was this done, when she tore what she had written, almost angrily; rose, walked up and down the room, and slowly returned to her seat to write once more. She folded up the slip of paper in the shape of a note, held it for a few minutes between her fingers, and at length, with evident effort, handed it to her sister, who now stood dressed before her.

"Rose," said she, in a low, steady voice, but without looking at her, "you will take this immediately, you know where and to whom. See no one save the person for whom this is destined."

"Very well," replied Rose, "I shall do so."

She looked compassionately at her sister, but Nathalie avoided the glance with evident pain.

An hour elapsed before Rose entered once more the house of Madame Lavigne But that she always looked thus, one would have said that Rose now looked very grave and sad. She slowly ascended the staircase leading to her room. She seemed to know without inquiry that there, and there only, she would find her sister. She was there, indeed, dressed now, but sitting in the same place and almost in the same attitude

She looked up as Rose entered; their eyes met, but neither spoke.

"Well," at length said Nathalie, speaking with evident effort; "you have been there, Rose, have you not?"

"Yes, I have been there."

"And you—you—I mean you gave the letter. What! did you leave it?" she added, with sudden terror as Rose did not reply. "Rose, you cannot have left it; it was not sealed."

Rose did not answer; but with averted look, silently handed a slip of paper to her sister; it fell from Nathalie's hand; for on opening it, she recognized what she herself had written. Her head drooped on her bosom, and she clasped her hands, as she exclaimed in a low tone:

"Returned! To what other humiliation am I reserved? And returned unread, no doubt?" she added, with an inquiring and wistful glance at her sister. "Well, no matter, do not turn away your head or look so sad, my poor Rose. I have often heard him say the time has long gone by when women died of grief."

Rose seemed strangely moved, but did not answer.

"But he shall, but he must hear me," exclaimed Nathalie, with a burst of sudden and despairing grief. "I am not proud, I care nothing about pride; where there is love, there is no pride. I have a right to be heard; yesterday I was his affianced wife, it cannot be that I am nothing to him to-day. Let him, let the world say what they like—I say it is love and not the word of mayor or blessing of priest that makes marriage. He will not read my letter—he shall hear me. If he will not see me, I will wait for him by the road-side; I know well the road he takes, and I care not how long I wait, nor who sees me, but come what will, I say he shall hear me."

"Hush! do not talk so," said Rose; "your letter was not returned."

"Not returned! Why then did you bring it back? Ah! I understand," she agitatedly added, "you came from me and were therefore refused admittance. Well, you are right, Rose, it was foolish in me to talk so. No, I shall not trouble him with my presence or with my words."

Rose turned towards her with an expression of deep sadness; their looks met once more. A sudden terror seemed to seize on Nathalie, for she rose and clasped her hands.

"Rose," she cried, "do not look thus and be so silent. No, it is not true; I am sure he is not gone. I am sure he is not. Oh! tell me that he will come back, sister; be merciful, tell me something."

Her voice sank down to a low and despairing tone, soon broken by convulsive sobs.

"Alas! my poor child," sadly replied Rose, "would I might have spared you this bitter trial; but it is the will of God."

She handed her another letter as she spoke.

Nathalie took it; she was very pale, and as she held it unopened for a while, her hand shook visibly. With an effort, she broke the seal, but a mist was on her eyes; the characters looked illegible and dim. She handed the letter to her sister, and said, in a low tone:—

"Read it to me, Rose; you read another letter once, not so very long ago. but rather different from this, I dare say."

Rose read. The letter was from Monsieur de Sainville—a last farewell letter—calm, indulgent, and very kind. He laid no blame to Nathalie, and took some to himself. "It was not," he wrote, "merely on account of what had passed between them on a previous day that they parted, but because they had loved most unwisely. Our natures," he pursued, "could never have harmonized. You would have thought me cold and indifferent, and I should have wearied of those doubts and unexpressed reproaches. I once thought the great difference between us favorable to our mutual affection; I have lived to expiate this bitter mistake. Believe me, my dear child, it is far better to part now than to discover our error later. Harsh, yet true philosophy! To say we shall not both suffer would be folly. Suffer we must, for we both love, and must for a long time love still. But time, as you too will live to know, cures many wounds. I leave to-morrow early; we shall not meet again, for a long time, at least. Perhaps your feelings are very bitter against me; yet I have a favor to ask, and by the memory of a happier time, I conjure you to grant it: do not forsake my poor aunt. Twice have I involuntarily been to her the cause of the same bitter sorrow; do not, I beseech you, abandon her. It will be long, very long, years perhaps, before my presence need disturb you in that house which I had once thought would be your own home.

"I know not how you will receive this request, for I know not how you think of me,—resentfully, I dare say. Do you imagine, then. that this separation is not to me also the source of bitter pain? And yet I have a consolation which, if I understand your character rightly, will be denied you. For, whereas you will do all you can to cast me from your heart, I shall still cherish the memory of the past, and of every thing which, from the first, made you dear. I have always loved you with a truer affection than you imagined; I call it truer, because I feel even now, that though it may change in nature, it cannot change in sincerity."

Rose ceased. Her sister looked up.

"Rose," she said, "there is more, I am sure, turn over the page; there must be something else—a postscript: look."

Rose silently handed her the letter. There was nothing else, save the word "farewell," which, in pity to her feelings, Rose had not read aloud. Nathalie glanced over the paper, put it by, and sat down near the table, in a listless and dreary attitude. Her sister stood before her, eyeing her with the sadness always inspired by the consciousness of unavailing sympathy.

"What can I do for you, my poor child?" she gently asked.

"Nothing, Rose, save to leave me alone for a while; I will soon go down."

Rose silently complied. After a while Nathalie took up the letter again, read it, and remained tearless. This was no time for the luxury of weeping; she had wept before, happy tears, in which hope and gleams of joy blended with sadness; but this foolish time was over now; the hour for real sorrow had come at last.

It was a genial morning, of summer's earliest and most lovely days. The sun shone brightly; its warmth was tempered by the fresh and pleasant breeze which came in to her, through the open window. A few children played in the churchyard beyond, the sound of their laughter rose pleasantly on the ear; the rooks cawed and wheeled around the old tower opposite; a servant maid in her high Norman cap and clattering *sabots*, sang in the court below, as she filled her pitcher of water from the fountain; Nathalie saw and heard all this drearily; a load of misery was at her heart. She wondered how the sky could be so bright and blue, when the sunshine of life was departed. How others could laugh and sing, when the delight of her existence had vanished for ever. She read the letter again; not once, or twice, but over and over. She dwelt on each word,—and she was ingenious in giving it the most painful meaning—so that its sting might enter her heart more surely; that she might quaff her cup to its bitterest dreg, and not be cheated out of one drop of her woe. For when she saw how miserable she was, she remembered how happy she might have been.

"I am nothing, it seems, but the merest stranger to him now," she thought, with a swelling heart, "but I might have been his wife, and I would have made him love me truly. I should have spent my life with him, been the mistress of his household, the sharer of his joys, and of his sorrows, if he had any. He would have left me occasionally, but I should have liked it. How pleasant to wait and watch for his return, and feel gladdened by the sound of his step; how much more pleasant still to meet his smile, and listen to his greeting!" She broke off, for she had been forgetting herself, and losing the truth in a dream. "And now," she thought, despairingly, "it is all over, and even the hope of this must never return. And my own folly has done it all. Had I the shadow of a wish to quarrel with him for power? Why did I not speak, when we met last night, and he looked the farewell he perchance did not know how to utter? He was mine, then, and for that moment. Why did I let him go so silently? Why was my foolish heart so full, that words arose to my lips, and only died away unuttered?"

She bowed her head, and for the first time wept long and bitterly.

The morning was over when Nathalie went down stairs. Désirée was ill, and Rose had to attend to household matters. The blind woman sat alone in her usual place; she reclined in her arm-chair, with her head thrown back, and her sightless eyes turned towards the light, which appeared to her like a faint white gleam; her hands lay folded on her knees—she looked fretful.

"I wonder what you have been doing up-stairs all this time?" she peevishly asked.

Without answering, Nathalie took the seat usually occupied by Rose, and continued her sister's interrupted task; but it soon dropped from her hands, and this the blind woman's acute ear detected.

"You are not sewing," she said; "I do not hear the sound of your needle and thread."

Nathalie did not reply. She was thinking that her old existence had begun anew. For a while she had entered the charmed island of promise which had so long receded before her. She had rejoiced in its beauty and tasted the sweetness of its waters; but now she was cast back on the dreary and desolate shore of her former existence. Hope had once lured her on; despair was her guide and companion now. The love she had given so willingly was rudely rejected; the love for which she longed was sternly withheld. She might thirst in vain along the dreary desert of life, no hand for which she cared would bring the cup of living waters to quench her spirit's burning thirst; she might feel weak and sinking, no protecting arm would sustain her in that wearisome journey; she might droop and weep, no bosom would be her haven of rest. To render her fate more bitter, she was gifted with memory; she could remember that a happier destiny had once awaited her; that she who was now an exile, had been blessed with home and native land. Then came the ever-tormenting thought, that by her own hand had this bitter fate been wrought. She might have avoided it—she knew him—his sternness and his iron will—the struggle between passion and resentful severity which had opened his existence as a man: but at her cost this time had the bitter victory been won.

"You will neither talk nor work; you are abominably selfish," exclaimed Madame Lavigne, indignantly.

Nathalie said nothing. She scarcely heard her.

"Give me a cushion to put behind my back," said the blind woman, exasperated at her silence.

Nathalie rose and complied apathetically. In returning to her seat she chanced to cast an abstracted glance at the mirror. She paused, wondering at the strange image it revealed. Oh! this was not the light-hearted and blooming maiden, with look so free, and smile so hopeful, whom she remembered seeing there but yesterday; that pale, mournful face, listless look, and drooping figure, belonged to some other. She now beheld a suffering woman, young still in form and feature, but with years of sorrow on her brow.

CHAPTER XXX.

Frivolous and capricious in temper, like a true daughter of the south, Nathalie was not frivolous at heart. What she felt, she felt passionately, whether in good or ill; but even her deepest feelings were subject to the sudden changes of her temper. She always felt as much in the main, but she often felt differently.

At first she had been bitter in her reproaches and self-accusations. It was her own folly had done it all; she might, had she been wise, have been the happiest of women. But gradually other feelings came to her; she no longer thought that she was alone to blame.

Had Monsieur de Sainville ever truly loved one he could so readily relinquish? He knew her with all her faults, her waywardness, and caprice; could he not have been more forbearing? He could! she resentfully felt it; but he had been as stern and relentless with her as if she were something to crush and subdue, and not one to love and cherish. He had seized on the words uttered in a moment of passion; and yet he acknowledged to her that it was not by those words that they were parted. It would have been soothing to her pride—though a most bitter thought—if she could have imagined that this separation was her own act, and hers only. He took care to inform her that it was not so; and she was reduced to feel glad that he had not received and read the submissive and despairing letter which she had written to him, after a night of misery. How would he have received it? With the pity and contempt which she knew that he felt for weakness.

But what stung her most deeply, was his promise of continued affection. If he had only spoken vindictively, yes, even with hatred, she could have forgiven him; for in the depth of his anger she would also have read the depth of his self-inflicted wound. But never, alas! was lover's farewell more calm or less impassioned.

Many days elapsed before Nathalie could be induced to see Aunt Radegonde in that dwelling where she had been so happy and so wretched. The gentle Canoness visited her once or twice, but she was effectually scared away by the ill-tempered growling of Madame Lavigne.

"My dear child," she whispered to Nathalie in the doorway, "how can you live with that dreadful woman? Do you think she is really blind? I can assure you I have my suspicions on that subject, and you know my penetration. Oh! do, Petite, do come back to live with me."

Nathalie shook her head, and replied in a low tone, that this was impossible.

"Well then, come and see me," urged the poor Canoness; "I am dying of *ennui* in that great château; even Amanda has left me, though I offered to raise her wages if she would only stay. The girl declared that she could not, that the people here were so *arrièré*, so void of ideas, it was impossible to consort with them. Think, Petite, how I must feel it, and do come and see me sometimes. I have come here twice, but really I cannot come again, for that dreadful blind woman looked—and I am sure she sees—as if she would turn me out the next time. Oh! do come."

Nathalie promised to call on her old friend; but some time elapsed ere she kept her word. On a bright summer evening she at length left the dull house in the court, and went up to the château. She walked slowly, for a heavy and unconquerable sadness was at her heart. The little town had formerly been surrounded by a wall; a few broken portions of it still remained, and at the extremity of the steep street which verged into the road leading to the château stood the arch of an old ruined gateway. It was near that very spot they had parted one evening, when by the clear moonlight she had read in his glance such deep, and as she then thought, unconquerable affection. She paused, hesitatingly, near the spot; had there been another path she would have taken it. It is a dreary thing to see with a changed heart the unchanged places where we have left a portion of our former existence, and which, alas! are too often the only things that keep faithfully the dreams and hopes of our past. Nathalie did not look around her; she kept her eyes fixed on the old gate; on the burning horizon, which seemed to pass behind it like a line of glowing fire; on the west, where the setting sun shot forth long slanting rays of dazzling light that streamed along the winding road and passed beneath the arch, giving a mellower tint to the stones embrowned by age and overrun with clustering ivy. The air was pure and still; not a breath moved the creeping plants, which sprang thick and luxuriant from every dark cranny of the ruin; and the slender grasses growing betwixt the highest stones rose straight and still on the blue sky unstirred by the faintest breeze. But in vain did Nathalie seek to fix her look on the splendor of the setting sun, or on the serene beauty of the evening sky. In vain did she seek to avoid glancing at the spot where they had both lingered together. Her heart would throb and her eyes turn towards it as she passed it by. A peasant youth and a pretty Norman girl were now standing there conversing in low whispered tones. A jealous pang shot through Nathalie's heart, and she involuntarily paused to look at them for a moment. "What had they come there for?" she thought; "were there no other places where lovers might meet and talk of love, hope and happiness—all things lost to her for ever?"

The Canoness was sitting alone in the drawing-room. She uttered an exclamation of joy as Nathalie entered, but it was soon checked by the young girl's pale aspect and desolate look.

"Pauvre Petite!" said she, kissing Nathalie, and taking both her hands in her own, whilst tears gathered in her eyes; "it was very kind in you to come. Yes, very kind indeed; for it is plain you do not like it. Oh! can I ever forgive Armand?"

"Let us talk of something else," quickly interrupted Nathalie.

But in spite of their mutual efforts, the conversation ever returned to this theme, and at length Nathalie ceased to check it.

Who knows but that as she sat there at the feet of her old friend, in her old attitude, with her head bowed and resting on her hands, she did not feel a strange and bitter pleasure in hearing mentioned that name, which, in spite of resentment and pride, still troubled and haunted her heart?

At first the Canoness was very indignant and prodigal of accusations; but when her long-repressed anger was thus disburthened, she softened gradually, and, without justifying her nephew, she spoke of him with less asperity.

"You see, Petite," she observed, with a sigh, "he is a cold, reasonable man, whom passion will never blind. If he was so in youth, is it astonishing he should be so still? We spoke long together on the evening before he went. I said many bitter things; he heard me very patiently, and replied, that he understood my anger, and that as it proceeded from love for you, he only liked me the better for it."

"'She shall always be dear to me as my own child,' he said. 'I once had other hopes; but it may not be. You must have her here with you, aunt; the close air of that court where her sister lives would ruin her health. If she looks pale and ill, procure her diversions, whether she will or not. A little travelling would do you both good. Why should you not go together to Provence; we have some friends there, and Petite would like to see her native Arles once more.'

"'Then you love her still, Armand?' I could not help saying.

"'As my own child,' he said again. He spoke so seriously, that I asked—perhaps it was scarcely right—'how he would like to see you married to another?'"

"What did he say?" inquired Nathalie, suddenly looking up.

"Nothing at first; but to judge by his moody look and compressed lips, it seemed no very pleasent idea. 'She will not think of that just yet,' he at length replied; 'and when she does think of it, I have no doubt that I shall have grown equally reconciled to what is now inevitable.'"

"Inevitable!" bitterly said Nathalie.

"My dear child," nervously observed the Canoness, "I am very sorry to have repeated all this; for, to tell you the truth, Armand made me give my word of honor that it would remain a secret between us, and that I would induce you to come here on my own account without so much as mentioning his name. Of course I should have kept the secret (you know my reserve), if it had not unfortunately slipped out. Indeed, Petite, you must not be too angry with Armand. He is still very much attached to you. There is nothing he desires more than for you to remain here. My belief is, that he contemplates ultimately adopting you as his daughter,—a much wiser plan than the old one. Indeed I always thought it strange so prudent a man should have thought of marrying a mere child; but I suppose the wisest have their moments of folly. *Entre nous*, Petite, I think your excitable little head deceived you; and that you never really loved him. I need not tell you that if you agree to this, you will be doing Charles no wrong. From the first I saw, with my usual penetration, that his uncle did not like him much; whereas you were always quite a pet of his. Oh! Petite, it will be much more pleasant thus. As for marrying, I am convinced you never will. I shall find so many good arguments, that I really must end by convincing you of the beauties of female celibacy. And when we are all three together——"

"Do not mention it," almost indignantly interrupted Nathalie; "such a thing is impossible."

"And why so, Petite?" quietly asked the Canoness; "I tell you Armand is as fond of you as if you were his own child. He has said so; and he never tells an untruth. Of course when love—which makes all the mischief in this world—is out of the question, there will be no more quarrelling."

Oh, poignant truth! which Nathalie felt in the deepest recesses of her heart. Yes, indeed, when love was gone, they might both live in peace under the same roof which was once to have sheltered them, not as two, but as one,—made such by what in her faith Nathalie held as the divine sacrament of marriage.

She resented the language of the Canoness as cruel and unfeeling; yet reflection assured her that it was not so, and that if Aunt Radegonde spoke thus calmly, it was because what then passed in Nathalie's heart was, and had ever been to her, as an unheard and unspoken language.

The young girl went home that evening with another torturing thought in her heart. Monsieur de Sainville still felt much kindness and affection for her, but an affection which she resented more than indifference. For love has many nice and jealous distinctions; it will have all or nothing, and scorns a part where it gives the whole. The thought that she had never been loved save as a pleasant and piquant companion. to be still retained even when the project of making her a wife had been abandoned, was a source of ceaseless torment, for it robbed her even of the past, that last refuge of the unhappy.

For the first time since his departure, she spoke openly to Rose. They were sitting upstairs in that little room which had once heard such different confessions. Nathalie told her sister all; the cause of their separation, his harshness, what Aunt Radegonde had mentioned, and her own bitter and burning resentment.

"I will never forgive him; no, not even in my heart," she passionately exclaimed. "What his aunt once told me is true, Rose; that man has a heart of stone. Woe and misery to the women who love such men!"

"Alas! why do you not say woe to the women who love at all?" sadly replied Rose. "My poor child, women are idolaters; why, then, should they not suffer? Their adoration is a fallen angel worshipping earthly idols within sight of heaven. But one woman have I known happy in her love, and she died a week ago. She was poor, plain, and no longer young, but she must have been happy, for she was truly loved. When her relatives came to claim the little she had left, her husband meekly submitted, and asked to keep nothing of what she had brought him save the pillow on which her head had first rested beneath his roof. Oh! pure and faithful must have been the heart, who, when she died, a wan, faded woman, after years of toil, saw her as fresh and as lovely as on the bridal day!"

"Oh! you may well call her happy, Rose," said Nathalie, with much bitterness.

"But it was a poor earthly happiness after all," replied Rose; "see how pitilessly it was cut short by death. Oh! Nathalie, set not your heart too much on things of this world; one grave shall receive the loved and the unloved, and when earth has covered them over, who shall tell the difference?"

Rose was standing near the window, in the moonlight, as she spoke thus. The tallow light they had brought up had burned away in its socket whilst they talked together, but a clear summer moon gave light enough to their narrow room. Nathalie sat, half-undressed, on the edge of the bed; she looked at her sister, and wondered whether it was the wan light now falling on her features that made her look so pale.

"Rose!" she suddenly exclaimed, "are you well?"

"Yes, pretty well."

But her voice was languishing and low. A thought which in her happiness, and in the subsequent misery, had never come to Nathalie, now suddenly smote her heart. She remembered signs long unheeded, or scarcely understood at the time, and for a while she forgot all about the past or present of her love.

"Rose," she anxiously said, "I feel sure you are not well."

"I have not been quite well of late," was the calm reply.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" cried Nathalie, in an agitated tone, "and I neve· noticed it. How cruelly selfish I have been, Rose."

She left her place, kissed her sister and wept.

"But child, I am not so very ill," said Rose, smiling faintly.

"Oh, Rose! it is not merely of your illness, I think, but also of my ingratitude in not noticing it before."

She seemed, and was really grieved, and Rose did not seek to comfort her. She thought that any diversion to her feelings, however painful, would be beneficial to her sister, and therefore allowed her to upbraid herself freely. But the diversion was brief. Rose, whose health had really been failing, partly recovered, and Nathalie became accustomed to the slight signs of ill-health which remained behind. It seemed natural for Rose to be so pale, and to speak in that subdued tone.

In the meanwhile it was agreed that Nathalie should remain with her sister. Rose wished it; she thought she could best combat the young girl's melancholy—she might indeed elsewhere, but the readiness with which Nathalie acceded to her desire, ought to have shown her the dangerous pleasure her sister was likely to find in this excessive retirement. To Rose this life was natural and congenial; she had submitted to it in the spirit of a martyr, and because it had purified and exalted her nature: she concluded it would do the same for Nathalie. But she had only dreams, vain shadows of the heart, to conquer, and her sister had its most burning reality—a deep, impassioned love to subdue. Religion and duty had been enough for the elder sister, but more was needed for Nathalie. She should have gone forth to seek forgetfulness, have entered into some of the active struggles of existence, have known want and care; and these stern guides might, perhaps, have led her through many a rugged path to the feet of peace. She knew this, and shrank from it with dread; she did not wish to forget, to be cured; she feared the solitude and indifference of the heart, which prudence told her to seek. She loved to brood over the sorrow which had become part of her being. At another freer and happier period of her existence, she would have considered it a most miserable destiny to be condemned to live with Madame Lavigne and Rose in this dreary solitude; but now the case was altered. Nathalie no longer felt alone; the past went with her wherever she moved; it wrapt her within its mournful shadow; it was not in Madame Lavigne's house that she lived, but in a haunted world, for which she would have dreaded the open light of day. She had come to the dangerous point of loving the fever which fed and consumed her being.

Now that Nathalie had once more lost her gayety, her presence was any thing but acceptable to the blind aunt of Rose. She complained; her niece resisted firmly and gently. She only wanted her sister to remain a few months with her, and when summer was over, she would find her another home. Madame Lavigne grumbled, but the purpose of Rose was not to be changed. Nathalie remained passive and indifferent. She saw that to Rose these contests were rendered painless by habit, and she herself became so much accustomed to Madame Lavigne's eternal reproaches, that they fell unheeded on her ear, and made no more impression upon it than the monotonous voice of falling waters to those who live within their ceaseless and rushing sound. In her better moments, Nathalie struggled against the torpor in all things save one, into which she was gradually sinking. She tried to live to reality, instead of leading a false and charmed life; but the silent house, with only the ticking of the clock, and the monotonous grumbling of Madame Lavigne to break on its stillness, with its dull subdued light and cheerless aspect, led her back almost inevitably to the land of the dreamy past. She even began to love her prison; like a nun accustomed to the deep shadow of the cloister, she shrank from the glare of day, and found both protection and freedom in the very routine which now shrouded her existence.

Thus passed away the summer.

Abstracted and wrapped in her own thoughts as she was, Nathalie saw that her sister was gradually though visibly declining. Even Madame Lavigne became conscious of this fact, and listened uneasily to the short and painful breathing of her niece.

"How does she look?" she once asked of Nathalie.

"Very pale and thin."

"But not very ill?" rejoined Madame Lavigne; "she has always been so, you know."

"Rose looks ill, madame."

"But why should she look ill? she has enough to eat and drink, surely? I stint her in nothing. Is it air she wants, let her go out and take plenty of exercise. But the truth of it is she is not ill at all, and this is only your foolish imagining."

"I imagine nothing," gravely replied Nathalie, "but I see, and cannot help remembering that Rose's mother was consumptive."

"But she is not," angrily cried the blind woman. "You cruel girl, how dare you say so of your own sister? Do you mean to say that Rose is going to die? Good heavens!" she added, wringing her hands with sudden distress, "what shall I do then alone in this house, with that old tyrant Désirée?"

Nathalie gave her an indignant look, which fell harmlessly on the blind aunt of Rose.

From that time the young girl watched her sister with a degree of sorrowful interest which partly made her forget the other feelings of her heart. Whether Rose was conscious of her state or not, Nathalie could not tell; she looked more thoughtful than was her wont, and there was an increase of gentleness in her manner, but when her aunt, in a sudden fit of affection, or rather fear, offered to send for a doctor, she merely replied: "It is useless." and it was hard to tell whether she spoke thus from the feeling that there was no actual danger, or from the knowledge that the time for warding off danger was already passed. Nathalie did not long remain in doubt on this point. On a dull autumn day, with a cheerless gray sky, that made the dark room where they sat alone working together, seem more dreary and comfortless than of wont, Rose suddenly addressed her sister, who looked, as she had too often looked of late, pale and sad.

"Nathalie," she said, laying down her work to look at her sister, "I had hoped better things of you; at first you struggled more courageously."

Nathalie, startled at the abruptness of this address—for there was one subject on which they never spoke—looked up uneasily and did not answer. Rose continued:

"Adversity has taught you in vain. Oh! foolish child, in what book did you ever read that happiness was the end of life, and girlish love the idol of a woman's heart?"

"In none," slowly answered Nathalie.

"And yet you act as if you had not only read this, but seen it. Every useless feeling is guilty, and be it love or resentment that now fills your heart, it is your duty to tear it hence."

"Rose! Rose!" almost passionately exclaimed Nathalie, "it is you that talk as they talk in books, coldly and dispassionately. May I not ask how you should decide on this, you who have never loved?"

"True, I have not," replied Rose; "but may I not have imagined what love could be?"

"You!" cried Nathalie, looking up. She saw a faint blush mantling her sister's pale cheeks, and her eyes fast filling with tears.

"Did you think then," said Rose, with deep and sudden sadness, "that because I was plain and unlovely, I could not dream of what love might be? Did you think then that because I seemed reasonable and calm, I had not a woman's heart?"

Nathalie was too much surprised to reply.

"Nathalie," continued her sister, after a pause, "I do not think I have very long to live. I believe you know it. I have at least noticed the watchful and uneasy glance which you have often fastened on me of late. Before I leave you, let me beseech you once more to rule your heart and its feelings. Life is brief; bear it in a noble and courageous spirit. I will not say, take example from me, because our positions have been essentially different; but I will say, hear me, and learn that every heart has its own sorrows. No doubt you, like every one, think me cold; whatever I may be, cold I am not; but youth is the key that unlocks after-life, and mine was very cheerless. Yet I too, calm as I seem now, have had my dreams, and dreams which would make the wildest romance I ever read seem poor and tame."

"I thought you did not read romances," said Nathalie, more astonished than ever.

"Not within your remembrance, I dare say; but years ago, when I was young, I read many; for then I lived in a land of unreality, of which they formed a part. No one ever suspected it; I was called apathetic, and reproved as cold. This was the misfortune of my life; I could not make myself understood. I felt it, and sought to undeceive no one. Who would have believed one so pale, so plain, so inexpressive in person and feature, had a heart to feel? You know how my youth was spent in this house with my aunt. Her temper has always been what it is She so effectually checked every thing like a free and happy feeling, that in the end reserve became a habit, through which I could not break. My most acute sensations have never betrayed themselves externally, and when I have suffered, I have suffered doubly. But, at the time of which I speak, I was happy in my heart's imaginings. All around me was harsh, stern, and displeasing; but I made myself a home and world of my own, wherein I moved and had my real being; where many loved me as I have never been loved, and greeted me with kind voices such as I never heard. Towards these imaginary beings I turned all the vague yearnings of my heart; but, alas! that heart, human-like, would not be thus deceived; it longed for truth; my soul soon sickened at the emptiness of its own creations; it turned away from them with bitterness and grief. Yet there were days when, repelled by every thing outward, I came back penitent and weary to my visionary home; when I recalled once more the ideal beings I had loved of yore; when I held myself blessed, though it were but for an hour, to quench my longing thirst at that fount of deceiving waters. This sounds strange, Nathalie, and yet you hear in mine the history of many a human heart. But there is a difference between my destiny and that of others, at least amongst those I have known. If they dreamed like me, they saw their dreams either broken or fulfilled; they drank from the cup of knowledge full draughts of bitterness or bliss; they passed the threshold of life and trod along its lovely or its rugged paths; and whether they were blessed or doomed, they at least accomplished their destiny. But with me it was not thus. I was haunted by visions which tortured me because it would never be in my power to test either their hollowness or truth. The knowledge, the actual experience, for which I thirsted so ardently was denied me for ever. Others passed on before me and engaged in the strife of existence; I sat an exile at the door, passive, listless, and unheeded. I could not be said to live; I glided down the stream of life without more power to direct my course than the barque which is sent adrift. No one seemed to wonder at this. Young girls came and told me their secrets, and let me understand it was because they saw I had no secrets of my own. They were right; I had no such secrets; I was excluded from existence. I sometimes asked myself if it would be always thus? I knew that it would, and my heart sank from this fate; from the cheerless relative who was my only stay, and the gloomy dwelling my only home. You complain, Nathalie, but I tell you that a sorrow, a real sorrow, would have been bliss to me, for to suffer would have been to live. I grew sick at heart and longed for death. I was not very devout in those days, and thought not, as I think now, of the Christian's immortality. Death then seemed a mournful and Lethe-like repose, a divine and lovely mystery; I looked not beyond that untroubled sleep in the cool bosom of the green earth beneath the blue sky. I prayed to die with the same ardent prayers I had once put forth for happiness and earthly love. I did not say to the Almighty: 'Take my life,' but I yearned for repose; and every passionate wish, whether embodied in words or not, is still the heart's truest, deepest prayer."

She paused. Nathalie, leaning back in her chair, with her hands clasped upon her knees, was looking sad and amazed at all she heard.

"You would not have thought this of me," said Rose, with a mournful smile, "of me, your calm, apathetic sister; nor am I now what I was then. I speak of feelings that have long and wholly vanished. Sorrow works its own cure. No human heart was ever framed for ceaseless repining. Mine left me; I remember the day and the hour. I sat alone in this room, near this window; it was evening, day faded fast, and a few pale stars shone from the depths of the blue sky above the abbey. My heart was very full. I knelt down and prayed in broken and inarticulate ejaculations. 'Why am I alone?—Why does nothing care for me?—Others are loved—why am I not?—Oh! God, since I am useless in this world—since woman's destiny is denied me—have mercy on me—let me die.' My tears flowed fast and I sought not to check them. I know not what day it was—some saint's festival, I suppose, for as I wept, the old colored church-window before me was lit up with the mellow light of many lamps within, doubtless for some evening service, and the organ pealed forth with a solemn strain, and soft voices, blending in religious harmony, rose sweet and clear in the silence of evening. My rebellious heart melted within me I remembered a sermon I had heard as a child on the text of 'Take up your cross and follow me.' A dim revelation of the truth came to my pining spirit; I saw and felt my sin; I confessed it before God. It was not my fate that was grievous, it was I who was weak and shrinking. My destiny was that of thousands: they suffered patiently; I asked to die. I had erred greatly; I had considered happiness the end of life; it is not, nor is suffering; those who say so blaspheme the goodness of God who has been prodigal of all joyful gifts. Yet there is much of sorrow here below, and were all pure bliss, man would still find vexation and trouble in his own unquiet heart. The end of life is duty. We all hear this, but we never know it until the truth is reached through tears and sorrow. Oh! why may not one bitter experience do for all? Why must humanity age after age be learning over again the same bitter and never-known lesson? From that time I entered on a new existence. I consecrated myself to the endurance of my lonely fate with a severe and holy joy. The cup was bitter still, but I now quaffed it with a fixed and upward look. When I saw other women happy wives and blessed mothers, when I remembered my own solitude with a pang I could not always repress, I tore the envious feelings from my heart and laid them prostrate at my feet; and I learned that thus to subdue and triumph was to live."

There was a brief silence.

"*Mon Dieu!*" at length said Nathalie, "is it all true? You astonish me greatly, Rose. I could not have thought you felt such things. Did your trouble go away so readily? Did you suffer and repine no more?"

It was some time before Rose answered.

"No," she at length replied, "I cannot deceive you, Nathalie; no, my trouble did not go thus away, and I did not at once cease to repine or teach my heart to submit. Resignation is a slow journeyer, but a long abiding guest. She visited me late; for I confess to you that one longing was at first only replaced by another. The object had changed, but I was still pursued by the same desire for real practical life. I am no mystic; mere religious feeling could never content me. It is good to sit like Mary at the feet of the Lord, but I had more of the spirit of Martha in me. Oh! that I had only been born in times of peril and strife; in the days of the early Church, and of the triumphant martyrs. It is hard to submit to a quiet, obscure, and apparently useless life; and yet this I had to do. It had pleased Providence to give me to perform those homely duties for which the world has no flattering voice, and of which no records are kept. To stay near this harsh aunt who daily reproached me for the bread I eat, and yet who wanted me, was my duty; I resolved that it should also be my sanctification and sacrifice. Nathalie, is your religious faith spiritual, is it more than mere form? If it is, know that you can never be all unhappy; that there is no destiny so miserable, but faith can soothe and purify; none so mean but it may raise and ennoble to the dignity of the holiest martyrdom."

She ceased, and the faint flush of her cheek, the transient light in her eyes, showed the secret enthusiasm of her nature. Nathalie was astonished and still more moved.

"I respect, I admire you," she said, "I understand you for the first time. But no, I do not understand you. Why, you have been as great a dreamer as ever I was, and yet you were so severe for my slightest fancies."

"Because, I knew to what they led," replied Rose, looking up; "besides, it was a habit I had taken, and I was not merely severe to you; I was as much so to myself. Long before we met, I had adopted as a cure for all my follies a strange remedy. I had decreed that I should be my own judge, and that from my own lips should fall the sentence of my condemnation. Thus I made it a rule to deride and stigmatize the folly of my heart. I found a cruel pleasure in destroying my own illusions one by one; in seeing them fade before my cold, reasoning arguments, as the last flowers of the year before the breath of winter. Nathalie, be wise,—check your dreams in time; wait not until the re-action arrives; wait not to know the bitter joy of being your own most cherished hopes' destroyer."

"Oh! Rose," involuntarily exclaimed Nathalie, "is there not something very dreadful in this suicide of the heart?"

"Sad, but not dreadful," said Rose, with a compassionate glance, "it is a suicide which one outlives, my poor child, and to show you this, it is, that I have said so much, and recalled feelings that are now for me like dim shadows of the past. May you too thus struggle and win."

Nathalie looked at her sister as she once more bent over her task; she thought of the living death she had endured for years; her heart failed her at the prospect of such a dismal victory, and an irrepressible voice exclaimed within her in answer to the wish of Rose:

"Nay, God forbid!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

Autumn had come, and Nathalie was still the guest of Madame Lavigne. Rose was now so weak that even her aunt perceived it was necessary for the young girl to stay, and she was the first to say;—

"Nathalie, you must not go.

A doctor had been called in, but he declared it was an hereditary, and therefore hopeless, case. He had attended the mother of Rose, and he said to Madame Lavigne, in the presence of Nathalie and Désirée:—

"She will die like your sister, quietly and without much pain. She is too weak to suffer."

Madame Lavigne heard him with a sort of apathetic terror. She thought how lonely the house would be when her patient niece was gone; and what would become of her, when she was left blind and helpless, at the mercy of the tyrannic Désirée.

The old servant listened, and said not a word, but for the whole of that day her face was troubled and very sad.

Nathalie was also present. She heard the doctor's sentence with a sickening heart. She had always loved her sister, but never so much as since the time of her own sorrows, for grief has a strange power in binding us to other hearts. Of late, too, since they had lived beneath the same roof, since they had spoken together in closer communion of spirit, her attachment had deepened. A change had also taken place in Rose with regard to Nathalie; her look rested more kindly upon her; her voice took gentler tones when she addressed her; the coldness and severity in her character, which had so often repelled the young girl, now seemed to fade away gradually before the approach of death, like the harsher features of a landscape, which are subdued into softness and harmony by the shades of evening.

A few days before her end they sat together in their little room, where Rose had of late remained almost exclusively. It was a calm autumn evening, full of serenity and repose. The tower of the old abbey rose in dark and distinct outlines on the blue sky; the colony of rooks cawed and wheeled round it in circling flight, before they settled down to their night's rest. Beyond the abbey extended the abandoned cloisters, and the lonely churchyard, with low gray tomb-stones sunk into the earth, and a few dark cypresses, rising tall and motionless. in the stillness of evening. The sun had set, but a rosy flush still lingered in the west, blending softly with shades of vapory gray, which melted in their turn into the deepening blue of the upper sky.

"It will be fine to-morrow," said Rose.

She was leaning back in her chair, which faced the window. Her look was fastened on the sky; her countenance was calm. Nathalie sat near her, looking at her sister, and holding one of her hands within her own.

"How do you know it will be fine to-morrow?" she asked.

"Look at those red streaks in the sky. Besides, the air is so clear and still. Listen, and you will hear the lowing of the distant cattle. How faint it sounds! The herds are coming back from pasture. Yes, it will surely be fine to-morrow."

The heart of Nathalie grew sad within her. She had seldom or ever heard her sister allude to the beauties of nature before her illness. but since then, the dying girl seemed to love such themes. The freshness of the summer mornings, the warmth and life of fervid noonday, the fading loveliness of eve, were for ever haunting her sick bed. Although Rose knew well her state, and never expressed the least regret for life, Nathalie sometimes feared her sister was not quite so resigned. as she had first thought her to be. When Rose spoke thus of what would so soon be lost to her for ever, the young girl gently endeavored to divert her thoughts. She now observed:—

"Madame Lavigne wishes to know whether there is any thing you would like to night?"

"She is very kind, but I wish for nothing. Look at that large, brilliant star, Nathalie. Does it not seem to rise slowly before us as if it knew of its own beauty? Is there not something of the spirit of life in its light, so tremulous and yet so clear?"

"It is very beautiful," answered Nathalie; "but I fear you will take cold, Rose." She rose to close the window as she spoke.

"Do not," replied Rose, arresting her with her pale thin hand; "there is no chillness in the air, and the sight of all this beauty does me good."

Nathalie resumed her seat. There was a brief silence.

"You may close the window now," at length said Rose.

"The room is almost dark; shall I get a light?"

"Not yet. My poor aunt being blind herself, cannot endure others to have light burning. I do not wish to vex her for the little while I have yet to live."

Nathalie turned her head away.

"Oh! Rose," she said at length, "why speak thus? You cannot know."

"But you do know," gravely replied Rose, "and knowing, should not seek to deceive me."

Nathalie did not answer. Her sister continued, "You see that I am well aware of every thing; we can therefore talk quite frankly; and there is a question I have long wished to ask you: what will you do when I am gone?"

"God knows," answered Nathalie, in a low tone.

"Will you stay here with my poor aunt, who has so great a horror of being left alone with Désirée?"

Nathalie shook her head.

"You will not," pursued Rose, "and I cannot blame you; it were, indeed, a living death But what will you do, my poor child?"

"Trust to Providence."

There was a pause.

"It is strange," at length said Rose, "but it seems to me as if you did not speak with your usual frankness. Answer me truly—have you any plan settled in your own mind?"

She bent forward as she spoke, to look at her sister, whose troubled and averted look confirmed her suspicion.

"What is it, Nathalie?" she gravely asked.

"You talk of settled plan—I have none, Rose, but when Mademoiselle Dantin called the other day, she asked me if I would return to her school after the vacation?"

"Did you consent?"

"No, I did not."

"But you wish for it. Why so?"

"It is as good a place as another, and she has offered me an increase of salary."

Rose looked at her fixedly.

"And these," she said at length, "these are your motives for going back to that school, so near that house which was once to have been yours? Oh, Nathalie! do you think me blind? Do you think me unable to read your heart and its enduring resentment. Oh! you are indeed a true daughter of the south—proud and vindictive."

A flush rose to Nathalie's brow.

"Yes, Rose," she said, with subdued vehemence, "you speak truly; I feel it is my mother's southern blood, and hers only, that flows in my veins. And in the south, if we know how to love, we also know how to hate. He once said I had energy enough for the feeling. I will show him he was a prophet. He said he would be years away, do not believe it, Rose: do not believe it. He will return soon, perchance; soon enough, at least, for my purpose. He shall see me the dependent of a tyrannical mistress, and he shall say to himself that he might have spared me that fate, for which I care not, but which, if what his aunt has told me be true, it will grieve and torment him to see. We cannot be so near without meeting; I shall neither seek nor avoid it, but I know that it will be so. He took one last look when we parted; I was pale and sorrow-stricken, then; but I am not so now; pride has come to my aid, and when we meet again, there will be enough left for regret, in the beauty that once pleased his eye. He will suffer, I know he will; let him; I, too, have suffered. He will feel that though thus ever near, we are for ever separated; let him; I, too, have felt it. There will arise in his heart a ceaseless regret for something lost; an unavailing wish that the past might be effaced. Let the regret and desire rise; I, too, have known them."

Her brow was knit, her look fixed, her lips were firmly compressed, and for a while her pale face lit up with something of the deadly beauty given to the Medusa.

"You see, Rose," she resumed, more calmly, "that I am, as you say, vindictive; but mine is the passing vengeance of mere feeling."

"What becomes of your vengeance, if he is indifferent and cold?" asked Rose.

"He cannot, he cannot," vehemently replied the young girl; "he cannot be so. Indifferent! I defy him."

"And if he repents; if he asks you to forgive the past?"

"He will not do so, Rose; but if he did, I should refuse him, as inexorably as ever he uttered refusal."

Rose looked at her with gentle seriousness.

"My poor child," she said, "can you indeed hold those feelings, whilst living, as you do, in the very sight and presence of death. Look at me; think of what I am, of what I shall be ere long, and confess that the feelings of your heart belong to the perishable, not to the divine, part of your nature. You have received your sorrow as a curse, and it was sent only as a chastening trial."

"Oh! Rose, give me your faith," sadly replied Nathalie, "and I will forswear my feelings, and confess that my fate is just. But how can I, when I see you so good, so meek, so noble, condemned from childhood to passive sufferings? I was rebellious, but you, Rose, needed no trial. What has your wasted youth led to?"

Rose laid her hand lightly on her sister's arm.

"Nathalie," she said very earnestly, "know this: none, no, none have ever suffered in vain. The silent tears which the lonely night beheld, were not in vain; the inward, and still unknown strife, was not in vain; not even the dreams of my youth, or the sorrows of your love have been vain. We are linked to one another, here, below, by a chain so fine, that mortal eye can never see it; so strong, that mortal strength can never break it. If the sorrow we have known has given us a more kindly feeling towards the suffering; if it has only drawn forth one gentle word more, can it be said to have been in vain?"

"Oh! Rose," gloomily said Nathalie, "life is more than a duty, at that rate; it is an eternal sacrifice."

"And why not?" asked Rose, with a kindly look; "why not? Yes, a sacrifice. There are many paths; the goal is one. Some—they are happy—are called upon to struggle for truth and right, in the sight of God and man; to endure the weariness, the burning heat of the noonday sun, until the evening's well-earned rest is won at length. Oh! great and glorious is their fate—a fate angels might envy. Others, less known, less tried, more happy, according to human weakness, accomplish humble duties, and follow only the cool, shady paths of life They toil and suffer, too, but the pure halo of a divine peace is around them still. To a third class, whom the Almighty knows as less gifted to act, less fit to soothe the woes and cares of others, another fate is given. Theirs," she added, and her voice grew tremulous and low, "is to pass through life in the vain longing for doing better things; in stagnant quietness when the soul's passion is action; their sacrifice is that of will. and they, too, have their reward, and enter at last into the end and consummation of all things—God."

But though the soul of Rose, long purified by faith, could rise thus high, that of Nathalie, darkened by earthly shadows, could not follow.

"And is this," she asked, looking at her sister, "the reward promised to virtue?"

"And why should virtue seek a reward?" returned the inexorable Rose. "Above all, why should it hope for what was never promised—an earthly reward? Who first invented that sinful lie? Crosses, sorrows, and untold agonies of spirit, these are its proper rewards; let it seek none other. But you look half terrified. My child, do not misunderstand me. All is not misery; there is joy in the brave endurance of sorrow; there is happiness in adoration, not in the cold lip-worship, but in the fervent adoration of the silent heart; and there is a divine peace in prayer. For what is prayer? Communion with God and humanity; with the great Being whose infinitude is beyond mortal comprehension; with the frail finite creatures who suffer here below in their narrow space. I can see you pity me; but when I have known all these feelings, is it possible I should think myself quite unhappy?"

"Do you regret life?" asked Nathalie.

"No; that were difficult," replied Rose, with a touch of sadness; "nature is weak, and according to her, I have not been quite happy. But my sorrows have led to this much good: that though I am young and see the light of life fading from me fast, I fear not death. Can the solitary lamp which burned unheeded through the long and weary night, see with terror the dawn which tells the coming of a purer day. We hear of the shadow of the valley of death; we should hear of the shadow of the valley of life; for life is indeed a gloomy valley, full of doubt, and still shrouded in dark mists. We descend into it we know not how; obscurity and dismay beset the path we must tread; we journey we know not whither, unless through faith; but as we ascend, the air becomes more pure. the sky more clear; and when we stand on the crowning rock, light reigns above, and darkness at our feet."

She spoke with fervent earnestness.

"I envy you your living faith," said Nathalie, eyeing her mournfully; "I am not happy, I feel as if I should never again be happy in this life; but I would not leave the dark valley yet, and my whole soul would sink with terror at the prospect of death."

"But you shall not die yet, my poor child," affectionately said Rose, turning towards her sister with a faint smile; "it is natural for you to feel thus. The flesh is weak in youth. Faith comes with sorrowing years, and when we leave its early hours behind us, life grows less dear. Oh! why at any age is death made so very awful? Why were the scythe, the skeleton, the grim visage, given as attributes to this gentle deliverer? I would have him an angel, calm, pitying and sad, but beautiful, and no king of terrors. A deliverer he is, for does he not sever the subtle yet heavy chain which links the spirit to the flesh, life to clay? Nathalie, do you remember that passage in the service of the Mass, when, after the Hosanna has been sung, the choir raise their voices and sing: Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini—"Blessed be he who cometh in the name of the Lord?" From my earliest years these words produced a strange impression on me. As a child I wondered what glorious messenger from heaven was thus solemnly greeted by those of earth. I thought of winged angels visiting patriarchs of the desert; of spirits in white robes with diadems made of the eternal stars. Oh, Nathalie! even such a pure messenger is death to me now. He comes, the bearer of glorious tidings, the herald of the Eternal, and I too say, 'Blessed be he who cometh in the name of the Lord.'"

Rose bowed her head and uttered the last words in a low tone, as if it were something inward, and not mere external sense, that spoke within her The moon had risen from behind the abbey-tower, and now threw its pale ray on her calm features and bending profile. As she sat there, in an attitude of monumental stillness, Nathalie gazed on her with an awe which is not that we feel for the dying or the dead. Rose belonged to neither: the barque was not yet bearing her away over that dark flood which leads to the better land; but she stood on the very brink of the breaking waves, and her clear glance seemed already to behold the unknown shore beyond. It was this awed Nathalie. To her that other world of which Rose spoke so calmly, was shrouded in mists. She believed, but human faith is weak, and she had too long made her home among the dreams and hopes of earth, not to dread bidding them a last farewell.

Three days after this Rose died.

It was a calm twilight; she had laid down on her bed to rest a while; Nathalie sat at the foot of her couch; an unconquerable sadness had been over her since the morning, when Rose had given a strange lingering look at the rising sun, and then turned away with something like sudden pain. Towards evening Nathalie had said to her:

"Do look at that beautiful sunset."

"No," replied her sister, in a low tone, "it is better not." and she steadily kept her look averted until the last golden gleam had faded away from the walls of the little room. Then she turned and looked at the gray sky, and smiled—perchance at this last victory. It was soon after this that she lay down; she felt drowsy, she said, and wearied, sleep would do her good. She spoke for a few minutes more to her sister, then slowly fell asleep. She woke no more, and Nathalie never knew at what moment, whilst she watched there by her sister, sleep had ceased, and death begun.

"She is sleeping," whispered Désirée, when Nathalie, at length alarmed, called her up; "she was always quiet—very quiet, Mademoiselle Nathalie: one never heard her about the place, she is a very quiet girl."

But when she saw what sort of a repose had fallen on the quiet Rose, she hid her face in her hands, and wept by that bed of death.

Like a shadow Rose had moved through life, and like a shadow she noiselessly passed away from it when her time was come.

Nathalie had not expected to hear this event announced, but neither had she anticipated the strange, heart-sickening melancholy which now took possession of her.

The degrees of sorrow are many, but all lead to the same bourne by the same beaten path. To have suffered once is to suffer for ever; the faculty, like thought, is varied and infinite; let it change as it will, it dies not, unless with our being

Once struck, that mournful chord vibrates unceasingly in the human heart, until hushed and snapped asunder by death. It may seem lulled to silence, but listen, and you will hear its distant murmurs low and deep, like the sullen voice of many waters. It is the stream, which once let loose, may not cease to flow, the mournful lament which, once awakened, is to sleep no more.

In our first sorrow we know not this. We mourn over a faded hope, as over the wreck of a whole existence; we defy future grief; all is absorbed by the one poignant pain of the present. But when the second sorrow has come, why does it not rest until the first is roused and awakened? Is there between the many griefs of man a link of mysterious brotherhood? Are they kindred, children of the same parent, watchers in the same mournful vigil, doomed to call one another throughout the whole weary night, and to break for ever the longing soul's repose? It would seem so. Time appeared to heal the wound; it only hid the shaft, it only buried the poisoned sting still further in the depths of the aching heart. See how living is the pain you thought gone, dead and buried! Like Lazarus, it slept; behold it now, breaking the bonds and cerements of the grave, and rising from its ghastly shroud into sudden resurrection and awful life! It comes as you saw it last when you deemed it dead, with its train of hopes sere and withered, like falling autumn leaves, with its unutterable agony of spirit, with all the bitterness of its last parting pangs. It comes to sicken and appal with the vision of the former years, bright and blooming once, pale and dreary now. It is not that the sorrow is suffered over again in all its anguish, or that the cup is quaffed once more in all its bitterness; but the dull, undying pain is often worse than the sharp pang that gave it birth; the dregs are more bitter than the full cup of grief, some sorrows are better endured than remembered; better by far the strife, the exquisite agony of passion, than the heart-sickening memory of its wreck and ruin.

Nathalie found it so. She had felt the loss of her parents with the brief acuteness of childhood's grief; but her love had been her first real sorrow; she had not, however, suffered incessantly—who does?—there had been moments of ease, almost of happiness, when she either forgot or hoped vaguely, but the death of Rose awoke her grief in all its first passionate strength. Yet what affinity was there between the two sorrows? Why did the shadow of her unhappy love darken the peace of that death-bed? She had thought the last sorrow could kill the first; she now found they went hand in hand, and gave each other new strength. Love is life; it shrinks from death with terror and dismay, and if Nathalie was unhappy, she had not yet reached the depth of despair which welcomes the thought of annihilation. She believed in immortality, but with the dim, imperfect state of the heart whose divinity is of earth. She stood alone on a shore dreary and barren, but she remembered the green valleys through which she had passed; she hoped to return there again, and she shrank from the dark sea which led to the better land. for death to her, ay, even a calm death, like that of Rose, was inexpressibly awful.

Her heart was perhaps chastened, but it was also wrung and dismayed. What was human love when the destinies of the beings who loved were so brief? Could the illness of a few weeks and a sharp pang be the end of a feeling that had seemed eternal? Did love die with life? or did the sacred flame burn on even when the mortal shrine which had been its home was broken and decayed, mere dust and ashes? She knew not, and it was because she doubted, that her heart sank within her; and this doubt, ere long, became the most bitter and tormenting part of her grief. For grief is of a complex nature; it is no simple regret for a certain good denied. That is the feeling of the childlike and the ignorant; that was the sorrow of the ancients—earnest and deep—but not the sorrow of modern times. We pay the penalty of feelings more refined, and therefore more easily wounded. That vague weariness of spirit which leads to suicide, was to them an unknown thing. They knew love with passion, jealousy, despair, and desire; but with them love was only love, no more. They had passions, not feelings; ardent wishes and no vague hopes. They loved or hated life, but never wearied of it without cause. The lover might die of grief, but the grief was simple, natural, and true. This was because they lived in a comparative state of youth and innocence, not that innocence implying the absence of what we term sin, but that which means a simple observance of nature's laws and feelings. When the ancients lost that childlike simplicity, they perished in art, poetry, character, and power. They were the infancy of humanity, immortal, glorious children, sublime in their way. but children still. for to them the real, the actual, was every thing. The spirituality, the idealism of modern times would have been to them as an unknown tongue. They never could have understood us, but we understand them, because we have all more or less passed through that phase of life, which to them was all existence.

Whether for good or ill we at least are different. One sorrow seems to wed us to all the sorrows of humanity. There is a secret link between even the disappointments of the heart, and the disappointments of the social strife called life. To women and their altered position is owing this vague and almost querulous sorrow. They are the living embodiment of the most heavy social wrongs, and their secret discontent swells the voice of general murmur.

Nathalie was of no metaphysical turn. She felt acutely without seeking to analyze her feelings. She had that genial southern nature which rejoices in the sunshine, but which also droops in the shade. She longed for happiness; she knew not how to suffer patiently. She was young, beautiful, warm-hearted, and she felt that her fate was hard. She submitted, but without resignation. At the same time she neither sought nor wished to forget. Instinct, far more than reason, told her that her love had become a portion of her being, and that should she ever cast it away from her, she would never be again what she once had been. The slave may break his chain, but cannot efface the mark of the burning brand. To drink of Lethe's oblivion is not to be renovated in all the purity and divine freshness of youth. Nathalie felt this, and she preferred the draught of bitter but living water, to the chill of that death-like cup. Her love to her was her life; she shrank with terror from the thought that it could die; that she had welcomed no glorious and immortal guest, but the frail, perishable sojourner of a day; a thing made of clay, food for the grave.

When Rose had once told her that her sorrow would soon pass away, she had felt the deep, unutterable desolation of spirit of the worshipper whose idol is laid low and who sees the sanctuary stripped and bare. She called her sister cruel in her heart; she felt as she felt once in reading that awful dream of the German poet, to whom a voice cried out from the depths of the deep, "There is no God." She rejected this mournful atheism; she clung to her faith with all the fervent adoration of youth; to think that she could forget, be happy, and love again, was to her no consolation, but a source of most desolating grief; for it said that love was no god, but an idol.

She resolved in her pride that with her at least it should not be so; that the feelings which had made her suffer so keenly, should be kept pure and unsullied; that it should last as long as life and be as a portion of her being; that time might fade the bloom on her cheek and whiten the dark hair on her brow, but that over her heart and its feelings it should have no power. She had heard that age had the fatal gift of chilling the warm blood of youth, that years could weaken the most impassioned feelings, that death triumphed over love; but she scorned the belief, she cast it from her with all the romantic disdain of her years. For, though her worship might be misplaced, she too was religious.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

Notwithstanding the entreaties of Madame Lavigne that she would stay with her, Nathalie returned to the establishment of Mademoiselle Dantin a few weeks after the death of Rose.

She had been a year away, and three teachers had replaced her and failed in conciliating the favor of the severe schoolmistress. One objected to having her letters opened, and left in consequence; a second was dismissed as too quiet; and a third for having failed in the respect due to Mademoiselle Dantin, who thus learned practically, that impatient as Nathalie was, she was upon the whole more forbearing than her successors. She asked her to return, scarcely hoping that she would do so, and was equally pleased and surprised at the ready consent of the young girl—a consent of which it is scarcely necessary to say, she never suspected the real motive.

At first the Chevalier felt delighted at the return of "his southern flower;" but, alas! a change had come over the blossom: it was not blighted, but chilled by the cold northern breeze of silent sorrow. The Chevalier soon perceived with dismay that Nathalie no longer cared for her knight. His admiration and old-fashioned gallantry wearied her. She thought him very kind, no doubt, but rather foolish, and was in no mood to humor him as of yore. Mademoiselle Dantin, who had always been a little jealous, approved of this change. Indeed Nathalie daily rose in her good opinion; she condescended to subdue the manifestations of her temper in her favor. To what she still had to endure, Nathalie felt perfectly indifferent. Grief is a good armor against the arrows of slights and sharp words. This apathetic spirit of patience had at first provoked Mademoiselle Dantin. She saw in it the result of a deeply laid scheme to insult her, and hinted as much to Nathalie, who only shrugged her shoulders in reply. Mademoiselle Dantin soon recognized her mistake; she also saw that Nathalie was wholly altered, and that the mischief was beyond remedy. The piquant quarrels which had shed so agreeable a variety over her former existence, were gone for ever. Her only consolation under this trying dispensation was, that by once more availing herself of the services of her former teacher, she had obtained a sudden and very unexpected influence at the château.

The Canoness having totally failed in inducing Nathalie to come and live with her after the death of Rose, had at first been greatly hurt and offended. But gradually her anger cooled, and with her usual kindness she resolved to do all she could to alleviate the young girl's position. She began by sending her flowers, at which the schoolmistress sneered; then a basket of fruit came directed to Mademoiselle Dantin, who condescended to accept it; and finally Madame la Chanoinesse Radegonde de Sainville requested the pleasure of Mademoiselle Dantin's company one Sunday evening, which pleasure the schoolmistress very readily granted. Outwardly she appeared very little flattered by these attentions and advances; but her inward self-congratulations were great. Few things could have pleased her more than to be a guest at the great house, and to sit stiffly in a high-backed chair facing the little Canoness, over whom, after a month's acquaintance, she tyrannized to her heart's content. In exchange for the pleasure she thus received, she showed herself very willing to relieve Nathalie as much as possible from the duties imposed upon her; for though she would not on any account have confessed it, Mademoiselle Dantin perfectly understood the motives which had induced the Canoness to seek her acquaintance.

But Nathalie obstinately refused to avail herself of the schoolmistress's leniency. She felt secretly irritated at the well-meant efforts of the Canoness, which only increased the fever they were meant to soothe. The flowers only reminded her of a lost and happy time; she would not grieve Aunt Radegonde by a refusal, but she gave them to the children without so much as bestowing a glance upon them. The fruit which came from the place of which she was once to have been mistress, she would not touch, and nothing could induce her to avail herself of the relaxation of toil the Canoness had ingeniously obtained for her from Mademoiselle Dantin. She had come to the school to lead a life of privation and suffering, and suffer she would. She was up early and toiled late; her dress had never been more rigidly simple; the Canoness wished to make her a few presents, Nathalie persisted in declining them.

"But, Petite, I am tired of seeing you always in that brown dress," once said Aunt Radegonde, with slight impatience.

"That brown dress is, however, exactly suited to Mademoiselle Dantin's teacher," replied Nathalie, with great pride.

"Oh! if you were his wife," involuntarily exclaimed the Canoness, "what would he have thought too costly or too rare for you?"

"Never speak so, never," cried Nathalie, almost angrily.

"Very well, Petite," meekly replied Aunt Radegonde, but it was a subject that ever recurred between them.

Of the indulgences offered by Mademoiselle Dantin, that of visiting her old friend was the only one Nathalie had accepted. She did not come often, and seldom unless in the evening, when school was over. It is true that Aunt Radegonde had begged hard for those visits, but it cannot be denied that not merely to please her had Nathalie complied; it gave her a tormenting sort of pleasure to sit where she had sat so often; see every place and object she knew so well; to brood over the past so full, delightful, and rapid, and compare it to the slow, dreary, present, and blank future of her lot. Yet it was not every spot she could thus venture to behold again. Aunt Radegonde once sent her to the library for a book; it was a winter twilight; and as Nathalie opened the door and entered, there was something so chill and desolate in the aspect of that solitary room, with its shadowy light, blank fireplace, unread books, vacant table, and unoccupied chair, that she turned away with a sickening heart, and ever afterwards shunned that place. Thus, in the routine of her old existence, in dreams of the past and silent endurance of the present, was the greater portion of the winter spent by Nathalie.

Contrary to the prediction the young girl had made when speaking to Rose, Monsieur de Sainville did not return. He was travelling over the south of Europe, and wrote occasionally to his aunt, who regularly read his letters to Nathalie.

In the first, he spoke kindly and affectionately of the young girl, but latterly he ceased to mention her name; and as his wanderings extended further, his letters became more rare, and every time more brief. At length, he remained two months without writing, or giving his aunt any clue to his place of sojourn.

On a chill February morning, Nathalie was suddenly summoned from her class to the room of Mademoiselle Dantin, who was confined to her bed by an attack of rheumatism, caught by watching the previous evening in the garden, in order to ascertain that one of the servants had not introduced some strange man within these sacred precincts. She averred having heard the intruder clambering away over the wall, and the satisfaction of not having been mistaken in her conjectures somewhat consoled her for the otherwise unpleasant result of her vigil. Nathalie found her buried under a heap of blankets: the tip of her sharp nose just emerging from beneath the bed-clothes.

"You want to speak to me, madame," said Nathalie, without sitting down.

"Yes, my dear child,"—Madame Dantin had become very affectionate of late,—"I want to speak to you; but pray be seated."

Nathalie complied, silently.

Mademoiselle Dantin coughed, by way of opening the conversation.

"You are aware," she observed at length, "that it has long been my intention to retire from the scholastic life?"

"Yes, madame, I am aware of it."

"Well, I do not mind informing you that I believe the moment to do so has finally arrived. Of course I am not going to let so prosperous an establishment as the only school in Sainville—my rivals have always failed, and gone away deeply in debt—go, as it were, for nothing. In justice to my pupils, I feel that I must not do so. Madame Ledru, a lady of Rouen, has accordingly opened negotiations with me on that important subject. The negotiations have been progressing for the last three months, unfavorably at first, I confess, but very satisfactory of late. Madame Ledru was rather inclined towards what I may call the Talleyrand school of diplomacy, but I so plainly showed her that finessing and soft words were alike lost upon me, that she has frankly confessed herself conquered. In short, we are as near agreeing as we shall probably ever be. I need not say my first stipulation was, that all the teachers should be retained in their present employ."

Nathalie bent her head in silent acquiescence. She felt perfectly indifferent to the contemplated change.

"This is not all," resumed Mademoiselle Dantin, after a slight pause. "Madame Ledru, after objecting to the purchase of this house and its adjacent garden, has nevertheless agreed to take them both at my very moderate valuation. I must confess that Madame Ledru was rather reluctant to do so at first, that she attempted to evade the point, but I was so resolute that she gave it up in despair, and offered me a certain sum if I would dispose of this house and garden to some other person; but I, conceiving that her objections were futile and fantastic, held firmly, and accordingly carried the point."

Nathalie heard her with evident impatience.

"Madame," said she, listening, "I fear my pupils are taking advantage of my absence to neglect their studies."

"My dear child," sententiously replied the schoolmistress; "youth requires relaxation." This was so unusual a sentiment for Mademoiselle Dantin to utter, that Nathalie wondered whether rheumatism had any effect on the brain.

"But, madame——" she exclaimed.

"I know what I am saying," interrupted Mademoiselle Dantin. "Yes, Mademoiselle Montolieu, youth requires relaxation; an hour's idleness will do the pupils a wonderful deal of good. Besides," she philosophically added, "it is no use of mincing the matter, I want you for that space of time, during which the pupils must manage as best they can without you."

Nathalie, who had risen, resumed her seat.

"Well, as I was saying," continued the schoolmistress, who liked, as she said, 'a logical sequence,' "I carried the point; but it does not follow that if I can oblige Madame Ledru I shall not do so. Far from it. The truth is, that a far more eligible opportunity of disposing of this house and garden has offered itself to me this very morning; an opportunity which, if I allow it to escape me now, may never return; and yet, how am I to avail myself of it—I ask you that, Mademoiselle Montolieu,—with these dreadful rheumatic pains that do not leave me one moment's ease; but I heard the fellow scrambling over the broken glass on the top of the wall, which is always a sort of consolation:—I tried to get up a while ago, and I can assure you that it was as much as I could do to get in again

I have, however, great hopes in your talents for business, which, if they equal your other talents," she added, with a gracious smile, "cannot fail from accomplishing the desired object."

"My talents for business, madame!" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Oh, it is so easy," coaxingly observed Mademoiselle Dantin; "and at the same time it will be excellent practice for you on some future occasion of your own; your marriage settlement, for instance; but with regard to this particular case you will allow me to give you a few instructions, suggested by my experience. In the first place, and as you are in a highly advantageous position, do not compromise it. Be careless, indifferent. 'Sell this house? Why, you do not care about selling it at all;' you are pressed; you yield, you are asked the price: 'Ten thousand francs.' The purchaser objects;—they always do. You point out the house is large and convenient; that the garden is beautifully laid out; that the beech-tree is celebrated for its beauty, and that there is even a legend about it; that the poplars are fine;—in short, it is a cheap concern at ten thousand. Well, the purchaser yields, and then you suddenly remember that you cannot sell the house at all; that it is promised to Madame Ledru; that she will be dreadfully disappointed; indeed, that no earthly sum will induce you to break your engagement to her."

"Oh, then there is to be no agreement after all!" very seriously said Nathalie, with something of her old spirit of mischief.

"No agreement!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin aghast. "Why, Mademoiselle Montolieu, what is all this diplomacy for but to render the agreement more secure? No agreement? Ah! if you only had a little experience of such matters, you would know that a business negotiation is very like a marriage, never more secure than when it is nearly broken off. But to resume. Nothing is, of course, to induce you to break your word to Madame Ledru; but you think it highly probable that for the moderate sum of one thousand francs, this lady may consent to wave her right. I believe I have been sufficiently explicit. I must trust the rest to your native tact, and knowledge of the purchaser's temper and peculiarities."

Nathalie looked up, suddenly roused.

"This may also serve to guide you," continued Mademoiselle Dantin, handing her an open letter as she spoke.

Nathalie rose and took it. She did not read the brief contents, but she saw the handwriting and name, and she felt as if a mist fell on her eyes, and the floor shook beneath her feet.

"You see," continued the voice of Mademoiselle Dantin, "our neighbor is a close man of business. He has long wished for this property, which is indeed a portion of the old Sainville estate: I may even say that he has made some overtures to me on that subject, but I was not going to sell myself out for him, or indeed for any body. Now, however, having learned, I suppose, that it is my intention to retire, he shrewdly concludes this is a proper time for driving a good bargain (an old man of business, you see); and no sooner is he returned to Sainville (he came the day before yesterday) than he writes to me about it. Ah! if it were not for these rheumatics! but it cannot be helped: besides, you may really do as well. You now understand why I sent for you. Monsieur de Sainville is to come at ten, and I want you to treat with him, or rather open the negotiation. I do not at all expect they will be of the Talleyrand school; but I have a strong impression that he will attempt a Bonaparte *coup-de-main*, and I would therefore have you on your guard."

"See him!" ejaculated Nathalie; "nay, madame, it would not be right,—it would not be proper."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said the schoolmistress, with a prim smile, "you know how I respect such scruples, yet allow me to say, you now go to the other extreme. In the first place, business can be transacted with any one; in the second place, Monsieur de Sainville is very different from his nephew."

Nathalie looked up with astonishment. It seemed strange no one should ever imagine what Monsieur de Sainville had once been to her. She pressed her hand to her forehead without answering. Mademoiselle Dantin looked at her with a very dissatisfied air.

"Really," she observed, with much asperity, "I cannot imagine what you find improper in what I suggest, Mademoiselle Montolieu. I believe I have as strict notions as any young lady on the delicacy and reserve becoming persons of the opposite sex. Yet I should feel no hesitation in meeting Monsieur de Sainville on any business matter; otherwise I might labor under some slight diffidence; and it strikes me as very extraordinary that you should object. Am I to understand," she added, with an alarmed air, "that Monsieur de Sainville is not one to be trusted with a *tête-à-tête?* You certainly know him better than I do."

"Oh, madame!" exclaimed Nathalie, "I do not mean that You might see him assuredly; but how can I?"

"If you allude to the fact of my being your elder," very sharply replied the schoolmistress, "I beg to assure you that it is one of the delusions of youth to imagine this fact makes such a difference to men. But I must confess I am concerned to hear such a character of Monsieur de Sainville."

"Good heavens, madame!" interrupted Nathalie coloring with impatience and vexation, "is it possible you should imagine any thing so absurd?"

"I see no absurdity in it," replied Mademoiselle Dantin, raising herself up in bed with a dignified air, which was increased by the white and peaked night-cap, not unlike a helmet, which she wore; "and indeed I begin to understand ——"

Here the door opened, and Marianne, still startled as of old, announced that Monsieur de Sainville was below.

"Come, my dear child," said the schoolmistress, whose scruples this announcement immediately banished, "do be sensible; and remember that Monsieur de Sainville is a grave man—quite incapable of any thing indecorous. I should not insist, but for this rheumatism, which will keep me here heaven knows how long."

"No, I cannot,—indeed I cannot!" exclaimed Nathalie, averting her flushed and troubled face.

"Then I shall go myself," exclaimed the schoolmistress, in high dudgeon, "and we shall see if Monsieur de Sainville will dare to misbehave himself with me."

Nathalie paced the room with irresolute steps, but as Mademoiselle Dantin was preparing to rise, the young girl suddenly stopped near her bed, and said, arresting her with a gesture:—

"You need not, madame, I will meet him."

Her face was pale, her voice was low, but there was firmness and resolve in both.

"You know that you are to ask ten thousand francs, and a thousand francs for Madame Ledru," urged the schoolmistress, as she was turning away.

"Yes, madame, I know."

"Stay another moment, Mademoiselle Montolieu, I wish to give you some further instructions. This house, you are aware, is very valuable. Monsieur de Sainville may intend pulling it down, but he cannot conscientiously hope to get the property for less on that account. Indeed, I may say this circumstance rather increases its value, since this house, having been inhabited by my late lamented father, my filial feelings will be greatly outraged at its being touched; I shall therefore—apart from the value of the property, and the damages of Madame Ledru—expect a handsome consideration. You understand."

"Yes, madame, I understand," calmly replied Nathalie; she had, indeed, heard every word; but whilst the schoolmistress spoke, her look remained fastened on a small mirror before her. A far deeper feeling than vanity made her look at the image which its depths revealed, and wonder if the keen look she was going to meet, would find her much changed. Nathalie might have felt quite easy: a little paler she was, but, upon the whole, her beauty had not suffered. There was too much wounded pride in all her sorrow for it to affect the springs of life: her grief had been deep, but never despairing.

This same pride which had made her endure so much in uncomplaining silence, now forbade her to avoid this meeting. She did not think he would imagine she had sought it; she would show him she did not dread it. He had chosen to part from her without anger, he should see that she, too, could be dispassionate, indifferent, and calm. Notwithstanding this final resolve, she paused on reaching the door of the saloon, and a strange oppressive feeling came over her; but she remembered the past, called resentment to her aid, and entered. She closed the door, then stood still, outwardly calm, but with a beating heart.

Monsieur de Sainville sat near the table, facing the glass door. The dull light fell on his features; Nathalie did not feel that he looked paler—he had always been pale—but more rigid and severe. He rose, and slowly turned round; but as his look fell on the quiet figure of Nathalie, standing in the gloom of the apartment, he suddenly remained motionless. His countenance did not so much express surprise as incredulity.

"He came back before yesterday, and did not even know I was here," thought Nathalie, with a slight degree of bitterness. He did not so much as bow to her, but she coldly inclined her head, and said, as she came forward.

"Mademoiselle Dantin is very sorry, sir, that a slight indisposition should prevent her from meeting you."

"Another day will do as well," he replied, taking up his hat.

"Mademoiselle Dantin," continued Nathalie, "fearing that her indisposition is likely to continue, has authorized me to hear your proposals, and, to some extent, to treat in her name."

Monsieur de Sainville slowly looked up and eyed the young girl very fixedly; but the cold, haughty glance that met his said, in language not to be misunderstood, "we are strangers."

The possibility of objection on his part did not, indeed, seem to occur to her. She took a seat as she spoke, placed a quire of paper on the table, and drew forward the inkstand as if for the purpose of taking notes of Monsieur de Sainville's remarks. For a moment there was a slight degree of hesitation in his manner, but it vanished almost immediately, and, with composure equal to that of Nathalie, he resumed his seat and said, quietly,

"Having understood that Mademoiselle Dantin intends retiring, I concluded she would no longer have the same objection to part with her property which she formerly manifested. Are you aware whether it is so?"

"Yes, sir, it is so."

"Pray, what exact value does Mademoiselle Dantin set on her property?"

"Ten thousand francs," quietly said Nathalie.

"Ten thousand francs!" he quickly echoed; "this is surely some mistake?"

"No mistake, sir; Mademoiselle Dantin's words were clear, and I paid them all the attention necessary in such matters."

"You are quite sure of it?" he said, with a fixed look.

"Quite sure," she answered with undiminished composure.

"But the property is not worth five," he exclaimed, with a decision that justified Mademoiselle Dantin's provisions of a Bonaparte *coup-de-main.*

Nathalie shook her head.

"The property is very valuable, sir," she seriously replied; "the house for instance——"

"Is only fit to be pulled down," he interrupted.

"But the garden is large."

"A mere strip," he somewhat contemptuously replied.

"The beech-tree is very fine."

"Decaying fast, I assure you; only fit to be cut down and sold as very indifferent timber."

"The poplars are good," rejoined Nathalie, who was growing piqued.

"Yes, but quite young, and of the worthless *fatigata* species."

His manner was so decisive and cool that it irritated Nathalie. She rose and said, quickly, "Very well, sir, I shall mention to Mademoiselle Dantin that you think nothing on all her property worth purchasing."

She spoke with some of her old hastiness.

"I beg your pardon," he said, more coolly still, "you quite mistake my meaning. On the house, beech, and poplars, I set indeed no value, for they are valueless; but the land itself is worth something."

"Is it, really?" cried Nathalie, with ill-suppressed resentment.

"Yes, certainly, worth the sum I offered. At the same time, as it is only natural Mademoiselle Dantin should attach some sort of value to the house and trees, I am willing to add another thousand francs. In short, to give her six thousand francs for the whole, provided only I may enter into possession within a month. It will take some time to prepare and lay out this place for next summer."

"Then he means to remain in Sainville," thought Nathalie, and the thought occupied her so much that she forgot to reply.

"Do you think Mademoiselle Dantin will accede to these conditions?" he resumed, after a pause.

"Perhaps so," carelessly replied Nathalie.

"I should like an answer before I leave," he continued, drawing forth his watch, "and I have an appointment at eleven."

"She declines, sir, she declines," said Nathalie, indignantly; "six thousand francs for a property like this! I do not know whether I shall insult Mademoiselle Dantin by mentioning the proposal."

He smiled coldly.

"I assure you," he said, "you may venture on repeating it. A worthless house——"

"It is not worthless to her," interrupted Nathalie, coloring; "It is no stately building, but she has lived in it for many years; her father lived here before her; she objects, sir, to having it destroyed; strongly objects."

"For how much will she wave that objection?"

"Sir!"

"I am afraid I do not express myself very clearly; my meaning is, for what sum will Mademoiselle Dantin consent to put by her feelings and resign herself to see this house levelled to to the earth?"

"Are feelings bought and sold?" asked Nathalie, with something like disdain.

"I believe it is no rare occurrence," he calmly replied, with that peculiar smile which she knew so well. "But if Mademoiselle Dantin does really object to having this house destroyed I am surprised the objection did not occur at once to so clear-minded a person. She surely never imagined I was buying her rickety house for the purpose of allowing it to stand."

"And why not?" sharply asked Nathalie.

Without seeming to notice her evident irritation, he continued:

"Are you quite sure that in her instructions there was not some sort of clause with regard to this—some sum named as an equivalent for her wounded feelings?" He fastened a keen, penetrating glance on her, as he spoke; she colored deeply, in spite of herself, at this instance of his old clear-sightedness; but she merely replied:

"Mademoiselle Dantin is willing to part with her property, sir, otherwise she would not have affixed any value to it."

"And I believe the sum you mentioned was that of ten thousand francs."

"Yes, sir; ten thousand francs."

"Which I cannot think of giving," he replied, rising as he spoke. "You will perhaps be good enough to mention to Mademoiselle Dantin what has passed between us. She may be induced to reflect, and alter her resolve."

He bowed politely, and left her. As strangers they had met; as strangers they parted. For a few seconds Nathalie did not move; she remained standing in the same spot, and with her eyes fastened on the door which had closed behind him.

"Heart of stone!" she said, at length, and burning tears of resentment and pride fell down from her eyelashes on her cheek.

Nathalie was going up to her room for the night, when Marianne handed her a letter which had been brought for her from the château.

She knew the handwriting and seal, yet she felt no emotion. She went up stairs quietly, laid both the letter and the light which she carried on a table, and busied herself about the room. Full five minutes elapsed before she returned to the spot where it lay.

"I had forgotten it," she said to herself; for pride has its own cherished deceits.

She broke the seal open, and read:

"Nathalie, what a mere child you are! Is it possible you thought to deceive me, and do you imagine I wished to deceive you? I did not think to see you at Mademoiselle Dantin's, for I did not know you were there; but when you thus suddenly stood before me, I felt like the father of a lost and wayward child, who longs to efface the memory of past severity with a caress and a kiss. I will not say you chilled—that is not in your power—but you repressed that mood. I saw that your resentment had not abated; that you would be cold and haughty; I humored you. One soon gets into the spirit of the past; but believe me, it is an easy and common accomplishment, unworthy of your native frankness and my experience. Several times I resolved to compel you—as I believe I could—to break through this distant bearing; but upon the whole, I thought it better not. You wished to impose this trial upon yourself and me; you had perhaps the right to do so. But I do not write to speak of this.

"I once wrote to you that we had loved unwisely: I do not unsay the words, but I add that we parted more unwisely still. I have tried to unlove you, and found that what might once have been easy enough had become a hard lesson to learn. Oh! different indeed is the love which springs in the fervid heat of youth from that which entwines itself around the heart of man in his maturer years. The one is mere passion, but the other is even as the blood that flows in his veins: the staff of his life, the condition of his being. Happy are those who pass through that first delirious phase, and never know the tyrannic power of the second. Where there is judgment and will, passion can be made an obedient slave, but love is ever master. When we parted I remembered another such separation linked with the story of my youth, and thought that after one brief pang I should grow calm again. I found that years had passed over me since then; that the habits of my mind had changed; that the elasticity of my first feelings had vanished. I saw that the love I had thought to subdue so easily, would long be a living fire in my heart. I vainly sought to forget those many trifles which had once made you so dear and attracted me so irresistibly. I was haunted by the very tones of your gay, girlish voice, by your cheerful smile and frank look. When I strove to banish your image, it only followed me more importunately; I went from place to place, but it was ever before me like a living presence: it looked at me with sad, reproachful eyes; for in those day-dreams I saw you not as you are—unchanged in aspect—but pale, drooping, and sorrowful: I could not escape it wherever I might go. For him who loves there is no solitude.

"When I saw how it was with me, I resolved to come back here, firmly determined not to feign an indifference I did not feel, but to ask you at once to forget the past, and become my wife. I arrived the other evening without sending word or token, hoping to find you in that place where I had seen you so often, and which, I also hoped, you would leave no more. That you were not there, was the first proof I got of your resentment. Harsh I may have been, yet mine has not been the sin no woman forgives: I have not ceased to love. You never had been dearer to me than on the day we parted, and I have loved you since then more truly than ever.

"I write thus because it is true, not to move you. If your own heart does not impel you to reconciliation and forgetfulness of the past, I wish not for either. Its arguments, as you once said, are worth all my logic. For this same reason I have not asked you for an interview. I do not wish you to yield in a moment of emotion, and repent it ever afterwards. I am not changed, Nathalie; you can see it by this confession; I am the same as ever; if you think I was once too severe and exacting, do not deceive yourself, for I do not wish to deceive you: I shall be so still.

"How will you act? I cannot tell. You have a generous heart and a resentful temper. I ask you frankly and honestly to forget; you cannot doubt my sincerity; and because you cannot doubt it, I do not and will not seek to influence your feelings. Reflect and decide; whatever your decision may be, I promise you beforehand not to seek to change it. If you refuse, I shall understand that by too much severity I have alienated your affection, and submit to that solitude to which my peculiar temper and character perhaps condemn me."

Nathalie laid this letter down and paced her room with uneven and irresolute steps. He loved her still; but that, perhaps, she had never doubted. She felt not only that he loved her, but that he had missed her deeply, and longed to have her back again. Yes, he would have a cold, solitary life of it without the gay and graceful girl who had once shed the sunshine of her presence in his home; he would miss her as woman, companion, mistress, and wife. For she often felt that his love was a mixture of many feelings, that he loved her beauty girlish grace, and piquant temper, and yet that, with all this there lingered a deeper and holier feeling for her in his heart

All this she knew, and, therefore, that he should return to her did not astonish her so very much.

But she felt wounded to find that he was, as he said himself, unchanged. Well might he say so! In every word he traced she read even more than his old haughtiness and pride. He came back to her, indeed, but in no submissive or suppliant mood did he return. Not thus haughtily had he wooed her when he first spoke of love! He had then stooped to argument and impassioned entreaty, and yet he knew very well that she loved him in her heart, and that little eloquence was needed to win the boon he sought. Why was he so reserved and so cautious now?

"It is pride, cold haughty pride," she exclaimed inwardly, "he will not seek to influence, because he will not beseech for that which he most desires; he would have no interview because he feared to betray himself. Be it so; I shall show him that my pride is as strong and as unbending as his can ever be."

She took up his letter and read it once more. Her heart failed her as she perused the beginning, but she gathered courage with the close. Still she hesitated, but at length her resolve was taken. She wrote a few words at the bottom of Monsieur de Sainville's letter, sealed it up, and went down. She met the servant in the passage.

"Marianne," said she, "can you take this letter for me to the château early to-morrow morning?"

"I can take it to-night," replied Marianne.

"And why not to-morrow?" asked Nathalie, with a strange feeling of hesitation.

"It will be much more convenient for me to-night," simply replied Marianne.

"Oh! very well," said Nathalie, in a low tone.

"Are you ill, mademoiselle?" asked the girl with some surprise, "your voice is trembling so."

She brought forward the light she held, so that its ray fell on the pale and troubled face of Nathalie.

"No," quickly answered Nathalie, "I am not ill; you are right; go to-night—go quickly."

She told her to go quickly, and yet the letter lingered in her hand. The girl had to take it of her own accord. Scarcely had she reached the door when Nathalie called her back. Had she altered her mind? No. She merely bade her not to be long away, and promised to wait for her by the half-open door. In less than five minutes the girl returned.

"I gave it to a servant, who took it up instantly," she said "Thank you, Marianne."

Nathalie returned to her room. She sat down on a chair and remained there pale and motionless, her eyes fixed on the floor, her hands clasped on her kness for several hours. Did she regret or repent the final step she had taken? it were hard to tell; yet this can be said, had the letter been in her possession once more, she would assuredly have sent it.

◆

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THREE days passed away.

Monsieur de Sainville sent no other letter to Nathalie; but she learned that on the day after receiving her answer, he had called on Mademoiselle Dantin, and failed in coming to an agreement with he.

"I never saw so sharp a man," angrily exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin: "no matter what you say, he has something ready for it. But his Buonaparte *coup-de-main* did not succeed with me, I assure you, Mademoiselle Montolieu."

Love disappointments evidently did not influence Monsieur de Sainville, or impair his talents in matters of business.

Nathalie repented less than ever.

On the morning of the fourth day she received a note from the Canoness, informing her that her nephew had once more departed on his travels, and begging her to call in the course of the evening. Mademoiselle Dantin, whom this intelligence greatly irritated, and who was not, therefore, in the best of tempers with the château, gave no very gracious consent, and observed with some asperity:—

"I hope, at least, Mademoiselle Montolieu, that you will be so good as to be in at eight."

Nathalie quietly assented. Thanks to the obstacles which her kind mistress raised one after the other; she could not call on her old friend until near seven.

"Oh! Petite," reproachfully said the Canoness, as she entered the drawing-room, "I thought you would not come."

"I could not be here earlier."

She sat down as she spoke, and rested her head on one hand, whilst the other hung listlessly by her side: she looked neither right nor left.

"Are you ill?" asked the Canoness, who was eyeing her wistfully.

"I have a head-ache."

"And yet you came; that was kind, Petite, I dare say you guess how dreary I feel alone, in this great house."

"Then you are alone?" asked Nathalie, looking up.

"Why, of course," replied the Canoness, "since Armand is gone."

"He is gone, then?" ejaculated Nathalie.

"Did I not write that he was?"

"Yes, you did."

"Well, then, why do you ask?"

"Because I had understood he meant to reside for some time in Sainville."

"Well, I dare say he changed his mind," replied the Canoness, after a pause. "You see, Petite, this is no pleasant place to him. It is not to me. Oh! when you have my years, you will learn that every place is haunted, and none so much as the place where we lived in youth."

Nathalie looked around her. Did it require length of days to acquire that bitter knowledge? This place was haunted for her too. Had she not dreamed there the thrilling and delightful dreams of youth—dreams too quickly faded; flowers withered whilst yet in their early spring?

"No," resumed the Canoness, "it is no pleasant place to him; I saw he felt it when he came back here the other evening. Yes, the past rose before him then."

She looked at Nathalie with some significance; but a bitter smile flitted across the features of the young girl.

"No doubt," she said, "Monsieur de Sainville must be reminded here of many things,—of his early love, for instance."

"Oh! Petite," replied the Canoness, with sorrowful reproach, "you say what in your heart you do not believe. Think of her! who thinks of her in this wide world save me? Not the husband, who instead of a childless, unloving bride, has a wife and and many children round him now. Not he whom she loved, and who rejected her so sternly! For between her memory and him there is, as you know full well, the memory of a second and far deeper love."

"Deeper!" echoed Nathalie.

Ay, deeper; I say not so to justify him, for my heart is sore against Armand. There were two young girls, one gentle and winning, the other spirited and warm-hearted; but both. I may say it, though you are one, both beautiful, pure, and good. and very dear to me. He loved and sought them both, and what was the end? It was natural he should seek Lucile; they had been brought up together. But you! good heavens! was there no other woman he could fix upon? He had travelled far and wide; he had been years away; he was rich; many, ay many of the women he must have met would have had him gladly. Could he not marry some prudent maid or widow of thirty? Why should he fall in love with you, precisely you, whom I had fixed upon to remain here with me? Why did he come evening after evening to the *boudoir* to teaze and torment you as one does with a bird, at whose pecking and vexation one only laughs? Why did he for ever keep coming to the garden after us, so that we could never be five minutes alone? Why did he make you fall in love with him? It still puzzles me to know how he did that, since from that moment all went wrong. When I spoke you answered at random; when he spoke I knew he was talking for you all the time, for he was fond of you in his way, and would think of nothing else; in short I had nothing else to do but to sleep or leave the room. Still it was not that I minded, for I saw you were both happy."

"He was not," interrupted Nathalie.

"Yes he was," pettishly said the Canoness; "I know him better than you do. It was one thing when you were away, and one thing when you were by. Then he no longer looked as he almost always looks—wrapped up within himself, thinking to himself, and talking to himself; no, there was something open and friendly about him then. Ah! Petite, the woman who has made a man unselfish, has achieved a miracle."

She eyed the young girl wistfully; but Nathalie remained cold and unmoved.

"He could not forget you even at the last," pursued the Canoness; "he was anxious about you; he wished you to be here with me."

"To live in this house, in his house! to eat his bread!" indignantly exclaimed Nathalie.

"He meant to remain years away."

"Had he meant to be away for an eternity, the house was none the less his; I could not have lived in it. Those walls would not have sheltered, they would have stifled me. Oh! Marraine! I love you much, else I had never crossed this threshold again. I have never done so without pain. I have never sat here in this old familiar place without a secret sickening of the heart; never."

"Resentful girl!" said the Canoness, chidingly, "What if he were sorry?"

"He is not."

"I say he is. Do you know him as I do? Are you his aunt? Can you remember the time when he was born? Have you my powers of observation? He is sorry, and it serves him well," added the Canoness very bitterly. "I saw it when he came home the other evening. 'You are alone, aunt?' he said, and gave a strange, rueful look around, but never mentioned your name. I watched him. he scarcely spoke, but kept glancing about the room very restlessly, as if seeking something. Once he stooped and picked up the velvet clasp I wear around my neck; you wore one like it once; he held it up and looked at it silently in his hand, but he never said: 'Is it hers?' 'I am so glad you have found it,' I cried; he kept looking at it, and never gave it me. 'It dropped from my neck.' I continued. He laid it down soon enough then. After a while he got up and walked up and down the room; his old habit, you know, and every time there was a sound below of opening and closing doors, I could see him pause and listen: but he never said: 'Do you expect her?' or 'Is she coming?' As he was going away for the evening, he bent over the vase of flowers on that table, and said carelessly: 'Where did you get these?' 'Oh, they came from the greenhouse, of course,' I replied. 'Then you went there to-day?' 'Went there in this cold weather, Armand?' 'Then who gathered them?' he asked impatiently. 'A servant, to be sure.' He looked disappointed, but still he would not utter your name. The whole of the next day he remained at home; he was tired he said, but he was expecting you, for he never left me. I have learned since he had forbade the servants to say he had returned. In the course of the evening he looked up at me once or twice; I thought he was going to speak, but he did not—and I said nothing.'

The Canoness paused. and again looked at the young girl. A slight emotion passed over the features of Nathalie, but she said calmly: "I grant that he is sorry; I should not have denied it; indeed, why deceive you? He has asked me to forget the past and become his wife."

The Canoness looked confounded.

"He has!" she at length exclaimed, "and what answer did you give?"

"That to forget is not to forgive!"

"You refused?" cried the Canoness, in a tone of angry reproach. "Oh, Petite! I thought you loved me! You refused when all might have been made right; when you might have been married to him, and we could have lived all three together—so comfortably."

Nathalie did not answer.

"If I had only guessed it, I would not have allowed it," dismally continued Aunt Radegonde. "Surely I have a right to interfere; but who thinks of me? who cares for me?" "Pray," she added, with a very melancholy groan, "when was it?"

"On Monday; he wrote to me."

"It was like his pride; he should have seen you, and not left you until you said 'yes.'"

"But he would not, nor would I consent," replied Nathalie, with a smile at her self-inflicted wound.

"Did you write back to him on Monday evening?" asked the Canoness.

"Yes, on Monday evening," quietly replied Nathalie.

"Then that was the letter he received whilst here with me," thoughtfully resumed the Canoness.

"What did he say? how did he look?" exclaimed Nathalie, laying her hand on the arm of the Canoness, and fastening a burning look upon her.

"Say, child," replied Aunt Radegonde, a little startled, "why, if he had said any thing, I should have known."

"Well, but how did he look?" urged Nathalie.

"Why, as usual."

"Not grieved—not sorry."

"How can I tell, Petite? He seldom shows any thing of the sort, and my penetration was not in the least on the alert about that letter; I thought it came from Mademoiselle Dantin. When the servant brought it in, he just glanced at it, as he took it from the plate, and laid it down then without seeming in any great hurry to open it. Yet, I remember now, he looked rather thoughtful as he stood before me on the hearth within reach of the table. Well, he did take it up and read it at length, and stood for a while with it in his hand."

"How did he look then?"

"As usual. He quietly folded it up."

"Without looking at it again?" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Yes, Petite; well, he folded it up, and put it into his pocket-book, and—that was all."

"And that was all!" echoed Nathalie, falling back into her old attitude, and relaxing her hold of the Canoness's arm. "Not one doubt that sight might have deceived him; not one despairing feeling to make him say, 'this cannot be true,' not even an exclamation or a look of regret. Oh! if he believed it so readily, he never loved me."

"He did love you, he does love you still, foolish child," ruefully said the Canoness, "and since he loved you so well as to conquer his pride, he would have made you a very happy woman. Oh! the pleasant evenings we should have had all three by the fireside; but through your obstinacy," she added, rocking herself in her chair, "all this is upset; I am, of course, to remain alone; I who might have had so delightful an old age; he will live and die an old bachelor, alone; and you will live and die an old maid, like Mademoiselle Dantin—alone, of course."

"Be it so," replied Nathalie, with something like energy: "be it so, I can endure that fate; solitude may sadden, but shall not terrify me. I have shown him at least that his wealth and rank could not bribe the poor teacher."

The Canoness shook her head and coughed dryly.

"Foolish child," she said again, "do you know Armand so little, as not to be aware that he has a very good opinion of himself? What man has not? Why, it would not so much as enter his head that a woman did not marry him for love! Besides, he knows you so well. Oh! foolish, foolish child!"

She shook her head and groaned. Nathalie looked up at her hesitatingly.

"What do you mean by saying he knows me so well?" she asked at length.

"I mean that he knows your character. Shortly after that evening when he told me he was going to marry you, I asked him why he had set his mind on so young a girl! 'Because I love her,' he carelessly replied; he was never very fond of answering questions. 'Well, but why do you love her, Armand?' I persisted, for though I am not inquisitive, I wished to know. 'Because she is young, pretty, and charming,' he answered. I said I was sure he had some better reason. 'Well, then,' he said, 'it is because she has such a good, generous heart.' 'How do you know?' I asked, to try him. 'How! why by her look, her smile, her voice; by her very way of speaking, by her step if you like. Be content, aunt, I am never mistaken in character, and I know exactly what sort of a bride I am wooing. She charms me because she is very pretty, and I am not of those whom beauty terrifies. She provokes me with her changeable temper, but I like to be thus provoked, and feel in myself enough power to rule.'"

"He said that?" interrupted Nathalie, with great indignation.

"Yes, Petite, but let me go on," replied the Canoness, looking at the clock. "'She makes me love her,' he continued, 'because she has such a very warm, guileless nature. It is like a summer's day of her own Provence—rather hot, but how bright and genial! Indeed, aunt, though you look so doubtful, she shall be happy and have her way in almost every thing. Yes, she shall feed, comfort and cherish as many *protégées* as she likes, and fill the house with pets if she chooses. No doubt she will be imposed upon every day—never to be made wiser,—there is no cure for a kind heart—and no doubt both *protégées* and pets will be wonderful pests, but in all that can gladden her—poor child! she is easily gladdened—in all that can make her cheerful face wear a more cheerful look, she shall have her way.' Well, Petite, what is the matter?" suddenly added the Canoness, as she saw Nathalie bury her face in her hands and weep bitterly.

"Oh! aunt," she cried, looking up and rising as she spoke, "do you think I have no heart? do not, pray do not torment me so! Do not tell me how kindly he loved me once. I know it, let me forget it. Why have you spoken thus the whole evening? Why do you keep telling me he regrets me? Did I not, too, feel something on coming in here this evening? Did I not say to myself: 'this is the place he left a few hours back, and where the warmth and breath of his presence still linger?' I am proud, resentful, I have rejected him; but I am made of flesh and blood, I have a woman's heart, and when I think of him and say to myself, 'it is past, it is quite over; he is gone again, perchance for years,' that heart feels as if it were well-nigh breaking."

She spoke with passionate vehemence, and many broken sobs. The Canoness was strangely moved; her features worked; she rose from her seat and clasped her hands; they trembled visibly; indeed, she shook from head to foot.

"Petite," she said in a broken tone, "it is true he has gone;

but I never said he would be so long away. He may come back sooner, much sooner than one thinks—there is no knowing. It wants a quarter to eight; that used to be his time; I do not say he will come to-night, and yet who knows?"

She ceased. Nathalie no longer heeded her. She had turned suddenly, arrested in a listening attitude towards the entrance of the drawing-room: a well-known step was on the stairs; the door opened; he entered.

The pause of sudden surprise as he saw her told her but too plainly that he was not privy to his aunt's scheme.

"I shall never forgive you, never," cried Nathalie, turning towards Aunt Radegonde. He looked at her pale indignant face as she spoke and understood it all.

"You have deceived me," continued the young girl, with rising anger. "I trusted you and you brought me—here." She uttered the last word with an indignant scorn that amazed and terrified the Canoness, little prepared for so abrupt a change of mood.

"Petite," she deprecatingly said, "I meant well; how did I know there had been an explanation? Oh! do not go," she added, seizing the young girl's hand, and seeking still more to detain her by her appealing look.

"Pray let me go," replied Nathalie, in the coldest tones, but speaking with subdued irritation.

"No," resolutely persisted the Canoness, "you must not go; shall she, Armand?"

She turned to her nephew, as if imploring for aid.

Monsieur de Sainville, who had slowly come forward, now looked up and said deliberately:—

"And why should not Mademoiselle Montolieu be perfectly free to stay or depart at her pleasure?"

His aunt looked confounded.

"Why, above all," he resumed, "should you appeal to me, aunt, when you know it is only because I enter this room she wishes to leave it?"

"Oh, Armand!" reproachfully replied his aunt, "could you find nothing but that to say?"

He did not answer, but the contraction of his brow, the rigid compression of his pale firm lips, the resolute meaning of his fixed glance, told not of humble or beseeching mood.

"And so you will go?" sorrowfully said Aunt Radegonde, addressing Nathalie, whose hand she had relinquished.

"Be satisfied, aunt," observed her nephew, with some slight degree of bitterness, "I shall soon leave Sainville."

Nathalie suddenly stopped short in the act of putting on her shawl, and raised her flushed face.

"If you mean to say, sir," she exclaimed, "that your absence will induce me ever to enter this house again—you are mistaken."

"There!" cried the Canoness, in a tone of despair, "you have done it, Armand; matters were not bad enough; you have done it, when you might so easily have asked her to forget the past."

"I have asked her," said Monsieur de Sainville, in a tone which implied, "I will not ask again."

"Come, Petite, he asks you to forget," eagerly said the Canoness, with a slight perversion of the truth; "do answer something."

"I have answered," coldly replied Nathalie, and her look said: "Nothing shall make me unsay that answer."

The Canoness indignantly sank down in her arm-chair, whilst she glanced from her nephew to Nathalie, as they stood facing one another, but with averted glances, on the hearth before her.

"Oh! you are well matched," she angrily exclaimed, "for you are both as proud and relentless as Lucifer himself!"

One impulse made Monsieur de Sainville and the young girl look up as the Canoness spoke thus. For the first time their eyes met; a change came over his features, and she slightly turned pale.

"You, Armand," continued the Canoness, "would break any woman's heart, and your own along with it—that is, if you had a heart to break—sooner than give in; and you, Mademoiselle Nathalie, you would cry your eyes out, and die with grief, sooner than say: 'I am sorry.'"

"Aunt," coldly said her nephew, "the time has long gone by when men's hearts broke, and ladies dimmed their eyes with weeping. If women do suffer from these things, they take care to lose none of their beauty. Sorrow falls very lightly on them."

Nathalie paused in the act of turning away to look at him with a somewhat haughty smile. She understood the implied reproach, and triumphed in it.

"And why not?" she asked, "why should not sorrow fall lightly on them?"

"Nay," he replied, with a smile as cold as hers was haughty "I do not complain; it also renders self-reproach more light."

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" mournfully exclaimed the Canoness, "it is getting worse and worse!"

"Aunt," quietly replied the nephew, "you mistake this case; the question is simply that, for reasons which then seemed to me very powerful, I thought it would be wise, for Mademoiselle Montolieu's sake, especially, to break our mutual engagement. I say for her sake especially, because the thought of her happiness was my most powerful motive."

"An instance of forethought I shall never forget," emphatically said Nathalie.

"So you have been kind enough to declare," replied Monsieur de Sainville. "But to resume. I have thought since then that I might have been mistaken; I have frankly said so to Mademoiselle Montolieu; she has declined taking this view of the subject; it was her right; I do not complain. This, aunt, is the case; this, and no more."

"Oh, this is the case, is it?" mournfully said Aunt Radegonde, in whom this freezing explanation destroyed every hope.

"I believe," replied her nephew, glancing towards Nathalie, "I have stated the case fairly."

"Very fairly," she composedly replied.

The Canoness glanced from one to the other with inexpressible sorrow.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she said very sadly, "it has come to this! You two who were to pass through life as one, you now speak so coldly! not even as enemies, but as distant strangers. And yet you were once fond of one another. I have seen you, Armand, restless until she came. I have seen you, Petite, unhappy because you thought you had vexed him. And now, *mon Dieu!* now!" She bowed her head, and her eyes filled with tears. Monsieur de Sainville looked disturbed, and began walking up and down the room; Nathalie repeatedly changed color, and stood for a while irresolute; she was abruptly turning away from Aunt Radegonde's chair, when Monsieur de Sainville suddenly stopped in his promenade, and stood still on the hearth before her. For a few seconds they eyed each other in mutual silence.

"Will you, or will you not?" he at length briefly asked.

He spoke with no lover's look, and in no lover's tone; but with that strange mixture of anger and tenderness to which the deepest feelings are often stirred in the human heart.

Had he put the same question in a gentle or guarded speech, denial would instantly have risen to Nathalie's lips; but now she could not reply; she could only tremble and turn pale. There was more than entreaty in his vehement tone and fixed look; these told of a love deep and unconquered still; a love against which pride and will had long struggled, and alike struggled in vain.

"Yes, she will, she will," eagerly cried the Canoness, bending forward; "she will, Armand."

Nathalie looked up; a reply was on her lips; the Canoness hastened to check it by reiterating:

"Indeed she will, Armand."

"Aunt, he replied, you mean well; but you do not understand either Nathalie or me. She is not one to be cheated out of consent; nor am I one," he added, after a pause, "to be satisfied with consent thus obtained. I have asked a plain question; she will give a plain reply."

"As plain as you wish," began Nathalie.

"No, Petite, no," interrupted the Canoness, alarmed at the pale severity which the young girl's features suddenly assumed; "no, do not."

"Nay, let her," observed Monsieur de Sainville, with some bitterness, "I know her; she is a true woman, resentful and unforgiving."

"Resentment?" replied Nathalie, in her coldest tones. "I have no resentment. And as for forgiveness, I have not, thank heaven, endured such sorrow as to render it difficult."

"He raised his look slowly until it met hers.

"I understand you and your meaning," he answered; "but do not think to deceive me. I seek not to deceive you. I say frankly, I have suffered. You may look at me if you like, and ask yourself why a few months have left those traces on my brow? Refuse again if you wish, but stoop not to feign an indifference you do not feel."

Nathalie had heard him with resolutely-averted look, as if resolved not to heed whatever he might say. When he bade her look at him, she involuntarily raised her glance. He looked pale and care-worn. For a moment she eyed him with calm composure, but suddenly she trembled, and her eyes filled with tears; she shook them away almost immediately, as if ashamed and indignant at the weakness.

"I will not yield," she passionately cried; "no, I will not forget or forgive that which I shall remember and resent whilst memory and life are left me. You are right in one thing at least: no, I am not indifferent; no, I am not cold; I am, as you say, a resentful, unforgiving woman, who has been wronged, and who feels it deeply. You harshly rejected me. I could not go and say, 'love me still.' I was at your mercy, and you made me feel it. I have endured the slight which only a woman can receive; I will have a woman's pride, yes, suffer as I may, and come what will."

She did not give herself time to reflect, think, or regret, but abruptly turned away, and left the room as she spoke.

"Stay, Petite, stay," cried the Canoness, rising eagerly.

But neither did Nathalie heed her, nor would her nephew allow her to follow. He laid his hand on the arm of Aunt Radegonde, and his grasp was firm as steel. He did not release her until the door below closed on Nathalie, then indeed he let her go, and began pacing the room up and down, precisely as usual.

"Then it is all over," despairingly thought the Canoness. "Heaven help me!" she inwardly added; "of what was only separation, I have made a desperate quarrel. Heaven help me!"

After walking up and down the room for about an hour, Monsieur de Sainville stopped short, and turned towards his aunt, with face so dark, and brow so severe, that the little Canoness trembled visibly. The sight of her terror recalled him to himself, for though he felt angry, he knew not how much he showed it, and was far from wishing to vent his anger upon this harmless, well-meaning creature.

"Aunt," said he, more gently than he had intended, "be not alarmed, I am not going to reproach. You did very wrong, but you meant well. It is scarcely your fault if I once more made a fool of myself. The mere act of loving implies folly and weakness, yet the greatest folly was not that which took place to-night: it was that which first led me to feel affection for a vain and heartless girl."

"Oh, Armand!" interrupted the Canoness, unable to bear this.

"I know you love her, yet she is what I say. She thinks herself proud, when she is far more resentful than proud, and more vain than either. Had she ceased to love me, I might admire her; but she has not; she loves me still to this very moment; and she has not the courage, the honesty, to be true to her love. She tried, in vain, to brave or meet my look. I believe she hesitated for a few moments, but the womanly weakness was promptly subdued; she looked at me unsteadily even then, turned away, and was gone. Poor child! she is applauding herself now. She does not know that as the door closed upon her, her triumph ceased, for at that moment my heart banished and shut her out for ever."

"The Canoness clasped her hands and wept. She had heard that inexorable voice once before. She knew again the very tones in which the irrevocable sentence of Lucile had been uttered.

"I mention this," resumed her nephew, after a brief pause, "because it is my express wish that such an attempt as you made this evening shall never be made again. Little regard as I now feel for her, I should be reluctant to inflict on any woman a severe, though merited, mortification. I do not wish to see, meet, or hear her. I would rather that her name should not be mentioned to me. It would not grieve me, but it would not be agreeable. I wish to forget her like one that has never existed. She has lost my esteem, and I do not feel very proud of ever having loved her. If it had been only a passing caprice,—a fancy for a pretty face, I could forgive myself the weakness; but it was a deeper feeling. She has wounded me as none save herself could wound, for to none have I yielded the same power. But I have no right to complain. I knew beforehand that the man who lays bare his heart to a woman must expect to see it pierced, and handled as the bird or insect given up to a cruel child. I had faith in her, thought her better and more generous than others. I have paid the penalty of my trust. Aunt, if those tears are for me, do not shed them. I need them not; I have been ill, I am well again. If they are for her, you may spare them. Lucile was too weak to suffer; she is too vain."

He bade her good night, and left her.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

Difference of character is said to conduce to affection. Persons of similar disposition on the contrary resemble parallel lines; they placidly take the journey of life at the same time, but not together; they follow the same track and never meet. Monsieur de Sainville and Nathalie had been mutually attracted by the great difference in their natures. Her frankness had delighted him; she had been irresistibly drawn towards him by what she conceived to be the mystery—a mystery which existed chiefly in her imagination—of his character. But, different as they were, they had many points of contact. Both were proud, exacting, and somewhat jealous. Both were independent in thought, speech and action, caring little for this world's opinion, and seeking not to win its esteem. Both, above all, whatever they wished, felt, or did, wished, felt, and did it entirely; the one with all the activity of his brain, and the force of his will; the other with all the impulsiveness of her temper and the warmth of her heart.

But here ceased the natural similarity, and began that fictitious resemblance which ever takes place between those whom one deep feeling unites, and whom one roof shelters. This similarity had extended far enough to do mischief, and unfortunately not far enough to do good. Monsieur de Sainville had indulged in some of Nathalie's perversity of temper; the shade of his skepticism and coldness had fallen on her genial warmth. Nathalie received and accepted more than her share in this unhappy exchange. She had often admired her lover's cold firmness; she forgot that it was tempered by judgment and a deep sense of duty. She did not acknowledge to herself that she wished to imitate him, and yet it was so; and when she rejected him so inexorably, there was in her heart the secret thought of compelling him to admire and esteem her whom he had ever held and treated like a child. When she learned from the Canoness—who soon called on her, and whom she questioned closely—how different a result her "firmness" had obtained; how she had sunk instead of rising in her lover's opinion; how he detected the weakness of a wilful and passionate temper in what she had considered energy and strength of character, she remained thunderstruck. For it was too true that she had but one thought—whether in good or in evil—to be something to him still.

This, however, had not been her only motive for acting as she had acted. She had been stung to the quick by the cold haughtiness of Monsieur de Sainville's submission, or rather return to her. She was necessary to his happiness, but could he have done without her, he evidently would. She remem bered the words of his letter, "I once wrote to you that we had loved unwisely; I do not unsay the words." "Be it so,' she thought, "yes, even though the wound should sink as deep in me, as I now see it will in him."

The first taste of vengeance is sweet, but the dregs are unutterably bitter; and, daughter of the south as she was, Nathalie found it so.

Monsieur de Sainville fell ill. Let not the sentimental reader imagine that his love-sorrows had any thing to do with his illness. It was a dangerous fever then prevalent in the district; it seized him like many others, and like many others there came for him a day when the doctor shook his head and said:

"There is no hope."

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said the little Chevalier to her one evening, "I suppose you know Monsieur de Sainville has got the fever, and lies in a hopeless state."

She had not so much as heard of his illness. The class was over: she was standing near the window working by the fading light of dusk. She did not faint or scream, she scarcely turned pale. She merely laid down her work, ran up to Mademoiselle Dantin's room, opened the drawer in which she knew that the key of the garden door was kept, took it, ran down to the garden, opened the door, and entered the grounds of Sainville. She had rapidly calculated that to go in openly would breed the inevitable delay of servants and messages; and what she wanted was to be in at once. Of Mademoiselle Dantin's probable wrath she did not so much as think. She entered the château unseen; ran up to the drawing-room, and appeared before the Canoness as pale and sudden as an apparition.

"You, Petite!" cried Aunt Radegonde, clasping her hands.

"Marraine," quickly said Natahlie, going up to her, "is it true? is there no hope?"

"Little hope, Petite, very little," sadly replied the Canoness.

"Marraine," said Nathalie, turning very pale but speaking firmly, "I must see him; but first tell me this, does he know he is so ill?"

"Oh yes, he asked the doctor, who, knowing he would not like to be deceived, told him at once."

"What did he say?"

"He merely said 'indeed!' and looked thoughtful."

"He did not ask to see me? he did not utter my name?

The Canoness shook her head.

"Marraine," said Nathalie, whilst tears flowed down her cheeks, "I must see him: he is not so ill—the doctor is mistaken. but yet I must see him. Tell him so."

"Petite, I dare not."

"Marraine, you must. Tell him it is not she who was once to have been his bride, his wife, that now asks this boon, but the poor girl whom he sheltered under his roof, whom he called his ward, and treated like his child. Tell him that, and he will not refuse."

"Poor little thing," compassionately replied the Canoness, "Do you imagine that will touch him much?"

"Try, Marraine, try; I beseech you, try. Believe me, he cannot refuse."

"Well, Petite, wait here and I shall see."

"Marraine," said Nathalie, following her to the door, "let me go up with you."

"No, no, you must not," cried the Canoness, much alarmed.

"Marraine, let me, pray let me."

"I tell you no; he would be very angry."

"He need not know it. Let me only stand outside the door, and listen, whilst you speak to him. If he consents I can go in; if not—why then I shall retire silently."

The Canoness still refused; but Nathalie besought her so ardently, and promised so solemnly not to attempt entering the room unless Monsieur de Sainville agreed to see her, that Aunt Radegonde at length yielded. They went up to the little turret which Monsieur de Sainville occupied. The Canoness entered the room, and left the door ajar, so that a ray of light from the dim night lamp within glided to the dark corridor, where Nathalie stood mute and pale in waiting. After asking her nephew how he felt, Aunt Radegonde mentioned the name of Nathalie, and said:

"She has been inquiring after you, Armand; she is very anxious about you."

He did not answer.

"Armand," resumed his aunt, in a tremulous tone, "why should you not see the poor child?"

"Aunt, allow me to ask you why I should see her?"

"To forgive her, Armand."

"I assure you that I have long ago forgiven her. It is not her fault if she is heartless, any more than it was the fault of Lucile to be weak. I wish Mademoiselle Montolieu all the happiness which can fall to the lot of a human being; but I object to seeing her; she reminds me of a period of my life to which I look back with annoyance and regret; of which I feel indeed that I have no reason to be proud."

"But if she were in the house, Armand?"

"Aunt, if she were at the door of this room I would not see her."

He spoke impatiently, and, as if tired of the subject, not as if suspecting the presence of Nathalie. His aunt did not venture to add another word.

After a while she rose, and went to the door.

There was no need to remind the young girl of her promise not to enter. Every word uttered by Monsieur de Sainville had reached her ear, as she stood there, listening with bowed head and clasped hands, like the culprit on whom the severe judge passes the irrevocable sentence. When Aunt Radegonde's sad face appeared at the door, Nathalie silently signed her to close it, then noiselessly glided down the narrow staircase. She left the château without heeding the wondering glances of servants who had not seen her enter; she went down one of the garden-walks, she took the path leading to the door; it stood, as she had left it, half-open, and only too ready to let her depart, and close on her for ever. There she paused. She looked back, her eyes blinded by tears, on the spot of which she was once to have been mistress, but from which she was now so sternly banished. She could see the faint light burning in the turret-chamber of Monsieur de Sainville, and she looked and lingered still. Oh, for the spell that could arrest her steps there; or, better still, that could lead her back to all she had left and lost—Faith, Hope, and Love! Like the first woman, she bade adieu to what had once been the Eden of her life. But Eve, at least, was not rejected by him who had sinned like her, and Nathalie felt in her heart that she had not sinned alone. He who had shared her fall shared her exile, and when she went forth banished, she left him not behind her.

She at length turned away, locked the door, and replaced the key in the spot where she had found it. She had been about half-an-hour away. No one had noticed her absence, and it was never known.

In spite of the doctor's predictions, Monsieur de Sainville recovered.

In persisting to remain near his abode, Nathalie had only thought of punishing him; with her usual want of reflection she did not consider that she would also punish herself. She soon learned that she had chosen a bitter and ever-renewing torment. The passion Charles Marceau had formerly felt for her had prevented any one from suspecting her engagement with Monsieur de Sainville, which, according to her wish, had been kept strictly secret. No one, therefore, felt any reserve in mentioning his name to her. She heard it daily; seldom with affection or praise. His severity, harshness, and morose temper, were ever commented upon, and bitterly censured, in her presence and hearing. Mademoiselle Dantin spoke of him with undisguised acrimony; the pupils, as of a severe, forbidding man; the gentle Chevalier himself had his word of censure, and pitied that charming lady, Madame la Chanonesse de Sainville, for having so sour-looking a nephew. And whilst strangers spoke thus freely of him who had once been the hope, centre, and end of her existence, Nathalie looked calm, and betrayed not the fever which his name ever awoke in her heart.

They met sometimes, but generally at a distance. Once, however, they were near enough for their looks to meet. Monsieur de Sainville gave her a cold glance, and rode on. Her look had been brief, but long enough to let her see that he was greatly changed: it was not, however, that he looked sad or unwell; by no means; but he looked gloomy, misanthropic, and stern. And such, indeed, he had become, according to Aunt Radegonde. He had always been a severe master, but he was now tyrannic; a strict landlord, but now, alas! he was pitiless. No fault or remission, however slight either might be found mercy in his eyes.

"I am afraid of him," the Canoness once acknowledged to the young girl, whom she occasionally visited. "Yes, I, his aunt, am actually afraid of him, Petite; he has grown so severe and sarcastic, even with me, and even about my poor knitting! Every word he utters is bitter and relentless."

Nathalie heard her with an aching heart. No severer punishment could have fallen upon her. It had once been her ambition to make her lover a better man. She now found that, powerless as she had been for good, she was not so for evil. Oh! bitter, indeed, is the thought of inflicting evil,—moral evil,—on the being we love! "And I have done this!" she thought, "I have done this! He once asked me to conjure the evil spirit of Will and Pride, and I have brought them down in legions around him, with Harshness, Despotism, and

Tyranny, and their spirits, too, in endless train." She wept bitterly. Nor was she mistaken. She had, indeed, done much harm. Monsieur de Sainville was pitiless to others, because he could not forgive himself the mistake and weakness, for such he now deemed them, which had ever placed him in her power. And this also Nathalie knew. She had heard him say so; she could not forget the words,—they were for ever ringing in her ears, the fiat of her new destiny. "I object to seeing her; she reminds me of a period of my life to which I look back with annoyance and regret, of which I feel, indeed, that I have no reason to be proud." It had come to this between them! Her health, which had resisted his absence, sank under the torment of his return. Once she resolved to leave the school, and seek some distant home, but her heart failed her when the moment came. It was misery to stay, and deeper misery to go. But no one, not even Aunt Radegonde, ever knew what she suffered. Pride supported her externally, but pride, alas! had lost its once boasted power over her heart and its sorrowing recollections.

One Sunday afternoon, in the early days of spring, she sat with Mademoiselle Dantin, the Chevalier, and some other persons, in the dull parlor described in the first pages of this story. The conversation had fallen on Monsieur de Sainville. Never had he been more unmercifully treated. Often had Nathalie accused those who spoke thus of exaggeration, but she could not do so now, for they gave facts. The little Chevalier was more than usually indignant.

"He is a misanthrope," he sententiously said; "he has an unnatural horror of the fair sex. Mademoiselle Beaumont told me that she met him a few days back, and asked him to direct her, having then lost her way, but he replied that he knew nothing about the place she was going to; and he said so without so much as looking at her, or behaving with common civility."

Mademoiselle Dantin smiled scornfully. She knew much worse than that. Monsieur de Sainville was a dreadful miser, a hard, stingy man. There was a poor widow, whose lease of land he had obstinately refused to renew, because a rich farmer had offered him a higher rental.

"Well, do you know," quietly said a sedate *bourgeois* of Sainville, "I think that cannot be true. At least I know a story that contradicts it entirely. Monsieur de Sainville was addressed the other day in a very rude manner, it must be confessed, by a peasant lad. He told him to hold his peace;

the lad laughed. Monsieur de Sainville, without more ado, struck him with his whip. The mother raised a great outcry; he smiled very scornfully, threw her a handful of silver, and rode on."

"This cannot be true," indignantly said Nathalie; "it cannot."

"I saw it," quietly said the *bourgeois.*

"There!" triumphantly exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin; "did you ever hear of such a tyrant? I hate Monsieur de Sainville, and so does every one."

"No one ever comes to the château," observed the Chevalier; "no ladies are ever admitted there, it seems. I do pity that charming Canoness, and you, Mademoiselle Montolieu."

But Nathalie was gone. She was in her room pacing it with hasty and agitated steps, weeping wildly with impassioned and distracted grief. The cup her own hand had poured out for herself, was full, and conscience sternly said: "You shall drink it." Here was her power over Armand de Sainville—here her dearly prized and more dearly earned vengeance. He, the proud gentleman, so jealous of his delicacy and honor; he had struck a child, and added insult to injury. She had not the consolation of knowing that the whole story was a gross exaggeration; that the blow was an accident, and the handful of money a single silver coin; she believed it, for evening after evening she had heard such tales, and most of them, as she knew too well, were no exaggerations, but bitter truths. "God help me!" she now exclaimed inwardly. "God help me! I have been a weak and faithless woman; I knew not that to love was a holy trust and a religious faith. I gave myself up to all the follies of passion, but the woman's true tenderness was not in my heart. If I wished for a lover's idolatry, why not have Charles Marceau? With a few kind words I could have kept him as a slave at my feet. But if I wished for serious, for higher affection, oh! why be not content with that which I won? Why weary it out with caprices? Why reject it when it returned to me, spite of all my follies? Well may he call and think me heartless! Well may he feel ashamed of having ever loved me! Well may he shut himself up and lead a gloomy and solitary life, when the being to whom he opened his heart, instead of gentle forgiveness, only thought of how she might inflict a deeper wound!"

She sat down near her open window, oppressed with care and grief. She thought of Rose, who had predicted this sorrow, and warned her against the poisoned jug of vengeance "Oh! that she were here to give her good counsel now." She leaned her brow upon her hand; heavy with weeping, her eyes involuntarily closed. Was what followed a mere deam; the continuation of some previous thought or real communion with the dead? She thought that she saw herself in the little churchyard of Sainville, standing near her sister's tomb, when Rose suddenly appeared before her, sitting calmly at the head of her own grave, and looking at her with gentle seriousness. But as is usual in dreams, Nathalie felt neither alarmed nor astonished at the apparition. She spoke to Rose, and told her all her sorrows; but without telling her, however, the secret desire of her heart, and yet Rose, unheeding the rest, answered that desire, and said to her with a smile: "Try."

"I dare not, Rose; I dare not."

But still her sister smiled, and said: "Try."

And her voice was so distinct and clear that Nathalie seemed to hear it still when she awoke with a sudden start. She looked around her; the little room was silent; the sun was setting in the west with a full refulgent glow which dazzled the eyes of the young girl. Her brain swam, and her heart beat tumultuously. Was it a dream or a revelation? Nathalie was not superstitious, she was too much of a southern to be mystical; no secret weakness inclined her to put faith in the supernatural. Yet for once she would believe; for once she would not heed reasoning, argument, or cold logic; for once, too, she would not pause, hesitate, or think; she would not take time to reflect, and perchance repent. She left the house at once, entered the avenue of the château, passed by the servant who admitted her without a word, and whilst he still asked if she did not wish to see the Canoness, she opened the library door and closed it behind her. Then for the first time did her heart fail her, and did she feel what she had done.

He sat near one of the windows reading; he did not hear the door open and close again; he did not see her until she stood facing him and her shadow darkened the floor before him. He slowly raised his head, looked at her fixedly, and his face darkened as he looked.

"You wish to speak to me," said he, rising; his tone was polite and chilling.

Nathalie at first could not answer; she stood before him pale and mute.

"I suppose it is my aunt you want," he observed, with slight impatience.

"No, sir, I came here to speak to you."

He offered her a seat, and resumed his. His face announced the inflexible determination of one prepared to listen, but firmly resolved not to yield. Nathalie's heart failed her.

"Sir," she said at length, in a faltering tone, "your aunt has often asked me to return to her as her companion; she said it was your wish that I should reside here with her; may I do so now?"

He gave her a keen surprised look, and coldly replied:

"How fond you must be of my aunt, Mademoiselle Montolieu!"

"May it be so?" asked Nathalie.

He frowned, and seemed much disturbed.

"You put me in a strange position," he at length replied; "allow me to inform you, lest you should be laboring under some mistake, that Sainville is and shall always be my place of residence. If any person has, therefore, given you to understand that I am going away for an indefinite period, that person has deceived you."

"No one has given me to understand this," said Nathalie, with a settled calmness that bespoke the resignation to endure much.

He looked embarrased. There was a pause. She resumed;

"May it be so?" Her tone was beseeching and low. Her persistency seemed to provoke him.

"Your conduct is strange and indiscreet," he said at length. "You will compel me to very disagreeable frankness!"

"Pray speak freely," she quietly replied.

"Well, then, allow me to ask how we can both reside in the same house?"

Strange question from his lips! She pressed her hand to her brow; she saw herself again in that same library one evening; she heard his voice again saying: "Remain my child, remain!" and looking up, she met his cold altered face, and chilling glance.

"Sir," she answered, very calmly, "do not imagine I shall seek to encroach upon you. Do not fear that I shall seek to meet you, for I know that you would not now as you once did, like it. But even if we should chance to meet, you are so indifferent to me now, that it surely cannot affect you; besides you need not speak; I know your face, its changes, its meaning. I know when to venture, when to draw back. A time may come when you will be indifferent and not care whether I am by, and then if chance should bring us together, I may not be quite powerless to cheer or divert your thoughts. Heaven knows I speak in no presumptuous spirit, and therefore though you now smile so coldly, I feel no hesitation and no shame in saying, that I long to do something that will lighten your cheerless solitude. Do not think for one moment I imagine you regret me; but do not tell me your are happy; I would not believe you. I have been a little sad of late, but there are days when I feel that I am still very young. I have not lost all the gayety of my years, that gayety which could once please or at least make you smile. For your sake I will bring it all back, for your sake I will be cheerful and gay. Oh! let me."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he coldly asked, "do you wish to come here as my aunt's companion, or as mine?"

"I understand the taunt," said she, turning pale, "but I do not deny it, Sir. I speak not to him whose wife I was once to have been—that is past—I speak to Monsieur de Sainville, my host, guardian, friend; my shield from ill when there were none else to shield me; my adviser when I was erring; severe sometimes, and yet kind in his severity. I seek not to recall the memory of a time when feverish passion troubled and deluded; when meetings ever seemed too brief, too few; when days sped fast like hours, or lingered slow like years; when doubt was torture, and hope enchantment. But I would recall those first few weeks when I was nothing to you, save a friendless girl to protect; when you were my kind indulgent host—no more; when we met without having sought it and spoke freely; when we parted without fearing the morrow; when time had the same calm, even flow from day to day. Oh! I like to think there has been between us some other bond besides the troubled, exacting feeling that embittered existence; that we were friends once! Why were we ever more, or rather why were we ever less? We are in the very same spot where first we met and spoke. Oh! that what has passed since then, were a dream! that some charm might carry us back to that hour! that you were again the host who questioned, and I the thoughtless girl who replied so heedlessly, and often made you smile!"

Sobs impeded her utterance. The memory, the bitter regret of friendship, affection, esteem, and confidence gone for ever, were upon her—they filled her desolate heart even to overflowing. He remained silent and unmoved.

"I regret," he at length observed, "to draw a nice distinction that has escaped you. I was your friend, and ever meant to be such; but there was, there could be no friendship between a man of my age and feelings, and a young girl of your years and temper. The feeling I had for you bore no resemblance to friendship; you know what that feeling was, how it fared, what it has become."

She bowed her head and clasped her hands; love had long been wrecked, but friendship could not perish; it had never even existed.

"Sir," she replied, in a subdued tone, "there is a feeling I thought little of till now, but which you cannot check; gratitude. I will be grateful to him who stretched out a hand to save me from disgrace; to him who protected me against his own sister and nephew, though, as it seems now, caring nothing for me; to him who was far more generous and disinterested than I ever thought."

"And how do you know he was disinterested?" he bitterly asked. "How do you know that from the first moment you stood here before him, a young and lovely girl, the singleness of purpose, the generosity you speak of, did not vanish?"

Strange confession of a bygone love! She looked up quickly, a flush rose to her brow, but his cold smile recalled her to the present, and a sharp pang crossed her heart.

"Then since you leave me no other claim," she cried almost passionately, "let me plead by the evil I have done, the pain I have inflicted. I have hurt, I have wounded you deeply; yes, deeply, and, in spite of all your pride, you know it. Not in the name of friendship which never was, of love which soon departed, but of sorrow and suffering which abide, do I beseech you now."

"You have courage," he said, looking at her fixedly, "and generosity too, I have no doubt; but both are useless in this case. It is not my aunt's companion you wish to be; it is mine. Do you think the world would not soon notice this? Do you think it would not soon construe into the most evil sense the fact of a man of my age having for his companion and friend a young girl like you?"

He spoke in a tone of one who has raised an unanswerable objection, but she quickly replied:

"Well then, let her not be your companion or your friend; let her be your child."

But his temper, which he had evidently been restraining forsook him as her pertinacity increased.

"Mademoiselle," he shortly replied, "I once told you I had the fatherly instinct most imperfectly developed. I have not improved since then."

"And yet you then called me your child," she sadly answered.

"Just as I called you 'Petite,' and many a foolish name besides."

Her eyes filled with tears. She remembered those names of endearment, ay, to the very low and lingering tones in which they were uttered; tones which rushed back to her now as he spoke in a voice so cold and altered.

"I was not asking for a father's affection," she resumed, "what claim have I to it? but for the shelter of a father's name. You once would not have disdained to give me that name as your wife, and I have done nothing wrong, nothing unworthy since then."

He did not reply, but his face darkened visibly.

She continued—

"You need not tell me that you will not care for me. I know and can bear it. Many a child through fault or folly is shut out from its father's heart. I shall fancy myself one of these, and move silently about the house until I am at last forgiven and restored to favor. I was proud once, too proud; but now I speak from the fulness of my heart let me be your child, your daughter."

"A nice father I should make," he ironically said; "very kind, indulgent and amiable."

There was hesitation in his very irony. A ray of sudden hope entered her heart.

"Let me, let me," she urged. "I shall be more patient as a daughter than I have been as a mistress, than I might have been as wife. You are harsh, you say, I care not; I will bear all, but let me be your daughter."

"Foolish, foolish girl!" he bitterly exclaimed; "how can you be my daughter? Have you forgotten you were once to be my wife?"

"Forgotten it! no; but I am not the idolater I once was. I do not think now there is but one way of loving; the mist of passion has fallen from my eyes, but believe me, affection, undying affection, is still true and fervent in my heart. You know I speak not thus to win back what was lost. You know

I do not. Look at me! I am no unblushing woman come to sue for love withheld. You know I am not. Therefore, I say again, let me be your daughter, your child, live here with you. Let the world wonder; it knows your honor; it will not dare suspect.

"Perhaps I may feel awkward at first as the memory of the past rises before me, but I shall know how to subdue this false and sinful shame. I shall forget the words of fondness and passion which once greeted my ear, to think only that you liked to call me your child, and perhaps never loved me better, when you called me so. I shall forget that once I blushed, trembled, and shunned a caress, for now it is I who shall seek my father, and sit down by his side if he will let me. Oh! let me be your child,—let me be your daughter."

She covered her face with her hands, and sank down on her knees before him, bowed, and weeping. At length she looked up; though his pale face seemed slightly moved, his look was stern and unrelenting still. But a faith, such as she had never known before, was in Nathalie's heart. She believed and hoped, both fervently and far too deeply to be so easily dismayed. She took his unresisting hands, she joined them on her head, she laid her head upon his knee, she said again:—

"Let me be your child."

"My child! my child, indeed!" he exclaimed in a broken tone.

She raised her glance, smiling rapturously through her tears; he stooped and lifted her up; his arms were around her, and held her fast; he gathered her to his heart; he kissed her many a time. She felt that he trembled; that tears not all her own were on her cheek; that the cold, stern man was melted; that pure love had triumphed; that faith had won. And as she twined her arms around his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder, with all the abandonment of a daughter's holiest love a joy far deeper, because far more pure than any she had yet known, thrilled through the heart that now beat near his.

"God bless you, my dear child," he said at length, looking tenderly in her eyes, "you have a kind heart."

"Then you do mean it, you do mean it," she joyously exclaimed, "I am to be your child indeed."

"Poor little thing! What precious boon is this?"

"A precious boon to me. Do you imagine I do not mean to consider myself your child? Indeed I will revere and obey you as a father; nay, I will even ask you for any thing I may need. Yes, without shame."

He looked much moved, but did not answer.

"I feel so happy," she continued, her cheeks deepening in color as she spoke. "Oh! this moment ought to last for an eternity. I long to suspend time, life, and being; but you look sad and grave! Oh, *mon Dieu!* I have a dread that if I leave you, and only go out of the room, you will repent, grow stern again, and reject me."

He only smiled.

"Monsieur de Sainville!" she exclaimed, with sudden terror, "give me your word that you will not retract."

"My child," he replied, "I will promise all you like; but do not call me Monsieur de Sainville."

"And how then must I call you?" she asked. with a delighted glance, for she expected that his reply would be "Your father."

"Armand," he quietly answered.

Nathalie trembled, and averted her look.

"Armand! Armand!" she echoed, in a faltering tone, "what daughter calls her father by his name?"

There was a brief silence.

"And what wife does not call her husband thus?" he at length replied. "Do not look so startled!" he added, detaining her as she attempted to leave him; "but hear me out. I know you did not dream of this in coming here, but what matter? Our old love is gone, you will say; well, be it so. Yours was more the romance of youth than true love, and whilst loving you, I fear I cared too much for your youth and delightful beauty. I look cold, but I am not; and, alas! have never been indifferent to such things. But now, my child, your love is true,—now mine is pure,"

But Nathalie was weeping; fear was at her heart; she clung close to him as if he had urged separation, not re-union.

"Oh! let me be your child," she said imploringly.

"Petite, you talk like a child; I shall make a confiding and indulging husband, but, believe me, an exacting and too jealous a father. I will have you love no other as you once loved me. I will share your affection with no living man. Remember that!" and for a moment he pressed her closer to him, with a sort of violence.

"Oh! I shall not marry, of course," said Nathalie, coloring, and speaking very eagerly.

"And do you imagine," he gravely replied, "that apart from every other consideration, I shall be so selfish as to accept the sacrifice of your existence? shall you alone be excluded from the destiny of woman? Shall you alone have no fixed position, no true home, no future, no husband to protect you, no children to love and caress? What father would doom his child to so cheerless a destiny?"

But still she wept, and urged her pleading, and asked to be 'only his child.'

"It shall be so if you wish it," he replied, whilst a change came over his features. "Yes, you shall be my adopted child, live with me, call me father, and bear my name. But do not deceive yourself, after this first moment of emotion, our intercourse must perforce grow cold and constrained. You are not of my blood or race: I have not known you as a child, and seen you growing up to what you are now. You were a woman when first we met, as a woman I have loved you, and that first impression I can never wholly efface. Believe me, the perfect freedom, the confidence, the unrestrained caress—these may not exist between us, these never do exist, save between those whom one blood unites. And yet, as I said, if you wish it, it shall be so, but I feel that this actual moment,—so pure, so delightful—once over, will never return again. You weep; am I grieving you, poor child! Well, if it must be, you need not speak; leave me quietly, silently; I shall understand If not, remain thus: my child—my wife."

He told her to leave him, but an irresistible impulse made him only hold her more fast. He bent over her; his voice was moved and low; her hands lay clasped upon his shoulder, and her face lay hidden upon them. He heard, he felt her weeping, but she did not move; he thought she consented; a blessing passed his lips; he stooped to kiss her cheek, but she shunned the embrace; she slowly raised her head from his shoulder, yet did not raise her look; she disengaged herself from the arms that encircled her, and gently drew away from Monsieur de Sainville, until she stood free before him. He did not seek to detain her—he did not speak, but watched her silently and with a strange pang at his heart. She laid her folded hands on her bosom, and stood looking at him quietly.

"Monsieur de Sainville," said she, in a tremulous tone, "I do not think I am worth very much, and yet if you care for me, you may have me. I do not think I am a great prize to win, but if you do indeed value me, here I am."

He looked glad, wondering, but she knew the privileges of her sex too well not to reverse the sign he had chosen—not to leave his side when she gave herself for life—not to withhold as affianced bride the familiar caress freely yielded as daughter and child.

He took the hand which she held out to him. He vowed to love her through life with fidelity, tenderness and truth; to protect and cherish her with all the watchful care of a father, all the love of a husband.

"And I, Armand," said she, looking up seriously into his face, "I vow to love, honor, and obey you, not by word of lip alone before the mayor or the priest, but with my whole heart, and in every action of my daily life"

This was their second betrothal The promise of eternal affection she had once required now came unsought; the obedience he had once exacted was now yielded unasked. The thought struck them both; their looks met.

"The new love is more faithful and less exacting than the old, my child," said he, a little sadly.

But a glow rose to her cheeks.

"No, no. do not say that," she fervently exclaimed. "I cannot at least sever myself from a past with all its errors so dear and delightful. I would not have that past effaced; that love dead and forgotten; my heart clings to both as to a part of my being. Speak not of a new love; there is but one; a stream of living water that never ceased to flow; that is fresh and springing still. What is altered? do we speak, look, feel differently? See! I sit by your side as I sat before, many a time; that face at which I now look is not less kind than of yore. If there be a change, tell it me not; my eyes and heart are blind; I neither see nor feel it. Breathe not a doubt, not one. I feel in a divine dream; waken me not. Let me float down the current of destiny: let me read the book of life slowly, page by page. If there be sorrow, faithlessness, and weariness of the heart in store for me, I shall at least have been happy for a few years; I shall have had my ray of sunshine, and many, God help them! see only the same bleak and desolate sky from the beginning to the end of their journey—speak not of change; I tell you there is none."

"Do you mean to say you are not improved?"

She looked at him with a smile.

"Not a bit. And you?" she added, after a pause.

"My poor child, I have no wish to deceive you. I certainly have not improved."

"To tell you the truth, I know it all; the whole town is full of stories concerning your amiability. You pass for a sort of Blue Beard, shut up in your château."

"Yes. I have grown morose."

"I saw it in your face the moment I entered the room;—yes, very morose, but I shall cheer you."

"And bitter, Petite."

"But I am so amiable! You look skeptical? Well, I have not been very amiable of late, but I will tell you why; one of your evil spirits—the spirit of cold pride—has been with me It is gone now, gone for ever. I have been trying to be you, and have made myself very wretched. I must be myself back again—there is no remedy for it I must be once more the foolish girl who quarrelled with Mademoiselle Dantin, and who very nearly quarrelled with you the first time she entered this quiet library. She is very faulty; I know that, and yet she has her good points too. When she is perverse, bear with her. and when she is foolishly-trusting, chill not her faith with cold lessons, for it is in her nature—she must go on, deceived if you will, but still hoping and believing."

At first he did not reply, but he made her turn her flushed face to the fading light, and looked at her attentively.

"Petite," he said, "you have a curious charm. By what secret spell have you wound yourself around my heart—I need not tell you it is not very tender, or yielding by nature—so that it almost seems I cannot help liking you still, no matter what you do? I loved another woman once, very beautiful, very gentle, very winning, but she never had that power over me, and when I chose to cease loving her, she could not make me love on. Why is this?"

Nathalie smiled with a smile so bright and radiant, spite of that dusky room, that like Una's angel face, it made for a moment

A sunshine in the shady place.

"Because," she replied, "I love with my whole soul, with my whole heart—that is the secret; you know it—there lies the charm."

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Canoness sat alone in her boudoir. She had been reading in her prayer-book, but it now lay closed on the table near her. She wept slowly; tears come not in old age with the same rapid gush with which they flow in youth. She felt sad and lonely. Her deafness had increased of late, and as she sat facing the window with her back to the door, she did not know that any one had entered, until her nephew stood by her chair. He took her hand, kissed it, and sat down by her side. Their intercourse had been cold and constrained of late; she felt this proof of returning affection, for her voice trembled a little as she said:

"How kind of you to come, Armand! I felt so dull."

"Your life is dull, aunt; you want some one—a companion."

The Canoness shook her head; her face became obscured. "She wanted no companion."

"Yes, aunt, you do; and I have found one for you."

"Indeed," she shortly replied.

"Yes, you will be charmed with the person I have chosen for you."

"I can choose for myself."

"Very well; I shall send word that she need not come."

He stretched his hands towards the bell-rope; his aunt detained him.

"Stay, Armand," she hesitatingly observed, "one must not send such a message; besides, what sort of a person is she?"

"A very agreeable person, aunt."

At the word agreeable, the Canoness took her attentive attitude, coughed, and fidgeted in her chair.

"Young?" she asked, pretending to look straight before her, but casting a stealthy glance at her nephew.

"Not twenty, I believe."

"Good-looking?" she asked, with the same look.

"She is very pretty."

"I will not have her!" decisively exclaimed the Canoness; "I will not have her!"

"But aunt ——"

"It is no use, Armand; I will not have her; not for worlds!"

"My dear aunt!"

"Not for worlds!" again exclaimed the Canoness, who seemed to be getting excited.

"But why so, aunt?"

"You are very inquisitive, Armand."

"I only want to know your reason for refusing."

"Well, then, I refuse because——because it is no business of yours, Armand," was her abrupt conclusion.

"Aunt, see this person. She has a charming face, a thing you like."

"So do you," muttered the Canoness.

"Her society would delight you."

"And you also, no doubt," she observed, in the same tone.

"She would walk with you in the garden."

"Or meet monsieur, my nephew, there." This was uttered *sotto voce.*

"And spend the evening with you in this pretty boudoir."

"Which would be much prettier than now, of course," dryly replied the Canoness, speaking aloud, for she was getting irritated.

"In short," calmly said Monsieur de Sainville, "it is so desirable a scheme that you will surely consent."

His aunt turned upon him indignantly.

"Armand," said she, drawing herself up, folding her arms, and sitting erect in her arm-chair, "am I or am I not a woman of penetration?"

"My good aunt!"

"No coaxing; am I or am I not a woman of penetration?"

"I never denied it, aunt; what about it?"

"Only this, Armand; the next time you lay your schemes, and think to make me the instrument; don't do it quite so openly. Do not, Armand," she feelingly added.

Monsieur de Sainville gravely inquired her meaning. But she shook her head, shut her eyes, and pursed up her lips. "She knew, but was not going to tell him; not she."

"I see, aunt, you are prejudiced against this poor girl."

The Canoness reclined back in her chair, and smiled ironically.

"How unjust! she has quite an affection for you."

"An affection!" Aunt Radegonde looked indignant.

"She has no greater desire than to spend the remainder of her days with you."

Aunt Radegonde looked confounded.

"She said she knew you needed her company"

"Company!—her company! Impertinent little thing!"

"Yes, she seemed quite confident about it."

The Canoness laid her folded hands on her knees, and turned her head from right to left, with a bewildered look.

"Little *intrigante!*" she exclaimed. More she could not say; she was, to use a French expression, "*suffoquée.*"

"Indeed," quietly continued her nephew, "her kindly feeling towards you quite won my heart."

"Won his heart!" The Canoness looked at him with silent reproach.

"Oh! Nathalie. Petite, my good child, my dear little thing," she sadly said. "I knew you were forgotten. I did not know you would be so soon replaced."

Two large tears trickled down her cheeks. Monsieur de Sainville looked a little moved.

"Aunt," said he quietly, "look behind you."

The Canoness slowly turned round, and uttered a faint cry: in the shadow of the room behind her chair stood Nathalie, looking at her and laughing and crying, as she looked both at once. The poor Canoness remained mute; but the young girl stepped quickly round the chair, knelt on the floor, kissed the hands of her old friend, and passing her arms around her, clasped her slender little waist.

"Yes, Marraine," she said, laughing, but her eyes and cheeks still glittering with recent tears, "here is the impertinent little thing; the little *intrigante!* Well, why do you not send her away about her business at once?"

The Canoness shook away the tears that would gather in her eyes; she laid one hand on either shoulder of the young girl, stooped and kissed her heartily; her face beamed with joy. Monsieur de Sainville stood leaning against the back of his aunt's arm-chair; he smiled as he looked on, with a purer joy and gentler emotion than any he had experienced for many a day. To receive happiness is delightful; to bestow it is blessed.

Five minutes had not elapsed before they all three looked very comfortable indeed. Nathalie sat on a low stool at the feet of the Canoness, and Monsieur de Sainville on a low couch by his aunt's side. The Canoness, like a practical little woman as she was, had, her first emotion over, exacted from Nathalie a solemn promise never to leave her again, which promise the young girl had yielded with a smile and a kiss. But though Aunt Radegonde ought now to have been quite happy, she did not seem so. She looked at Monsieur de Sainville; he had relapsed into his usual gravity; she glanced at Nathalie, the young girl seemed rather pensive. The Canoness smiled to herself with an air of much finesse, and felt that until *she* interfered, certain matters would never go right. She hesitatingly took her nephew's hand and held it fast between her slender little fingers, whose grasp he could with one effort have eluded; then she took Nathalie's hand and softly glided it into his; and holding those two hands firmly clasped within her own, she gave the owners a wistful and appealing look.

"Children," she began, but her voice faltered and died inarticulately away, whilst her eyes overflowed with tears—

"Come, aunt," quietly said Monsieur de Sainville, "be quite easy; Petite and I are friends."

"Thank heaven!" devoutly said the Canoness, much relieved. But in a few moments her fears and doubts returned. She looked inquiringly at her nephew and Nathalie. They looked calm and happy enough, but, with her usual penetration, Aunt Radegonde saw plainly all was not yet quite right.

"Armand," she said, very seriously, "do you think me a woman of experience, and will you take my advice?"

"That depends on the advice, aunt," he replied with a smile.

"Armand," decisively said the Canoness, her heart beating, however, at the daring experiment she made, "Armand, marry Petite."

Her heart failed her; he did not answer; he looked grave, and she construed his gravity into displeasure.

"Armand," she said, with much emotion, "marry her; she loves you in her heart, she does. I never told you before, but I will tell you now, that when you were ill she stood at the door of your room pale and trembling, poor child, and when I went to whisper that you would not see her, she just bowed her head, and turning away, gave a look at that threshold which she might not cross—a look that almost broke my heart. "I will not hush," said she, pushing away the hand which Nathalie quickly laid on her lips, "I will not hush! do you think I have nothing to say about him? do you think he has not longed to have his own Petite back again; ay, many a time? Do you think he would not now give any thing to have her sitting by his side, as she has sat so often? He would, child, he would, let him deny it if he can!"

He denied nothing. The Canoness, who watched him eagerly, felt that the decisive moment was come. She rose from her seat, pale and trembling; she took Nathalie's hand and made her rise too; she led her to her nephew, and the young girl yielded to her, blushing and docile.

"Why do you bring me this perverse little thing?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, trying to frown as his aunt and the young girl stood before him; but even as he spoke he fondly drew Nathalie towards him, and making her sit on the couch by his side, encircled her with one arm, and held her fast. She slightly drew away from him, and looked up into his face with a smile, half-arch, half-triumphant.

"You need not have this perverse little thing if you do not choose, sir," she said, in a light mocking tone. She made a motion to leave his side, but who shall say that in her heart she either cared to go, or thought he would let her depart? He did not, but complacently lifted up and smoothed back a disordered tress of her dark hair, whilst she, thus sitting by him, one hand lightly laid on his shoulder, looked at her old friend with happy and blushing pride.

The little Canoness stood before them, her eyes blinded by joyful tears. To her dying day this good creature will believe that she, and she alone, reconciled them; and to her dying day Monsieur de Sainville, and she who is now his wife, will tenderly indulge her in the dear illusion.

"Ah! wise as he thinks himself, see how fondly he loves her!" thought Aunt Radegonde, as she resumed her seat, and thence watched them, smiling and elated at the submission of man's wisdom to woman's power. "Well, Monsieur Armand and Mademoiselle Petite," she observed aloud, "you may thank me for this."

Both looked up, and smiled at one another first, then at her.

"I wish," said her nephew, "you would tell Mademoiselle Petite to take off her scarf."

"Mademoiselle Dantin will scold if she remains too late," hesitatingly observed the Canoness, who held her sour-tempered neighbor in secret awe.

"Who cares about Mademoiselle Dantin?" was the irreverent reply. "Are you afraid of her, aunt?"

"No, indeed, Armand, but Petite——"

"Petite is greatly changed if she is afraid of any thing or any one," interrupted Monsieur de Sainville.

Willing to convince him that no important change had taken place in her temper, Nathalie unfastened her scarf with silent deliberation, thus expressing her determination to remain, even at the imminent risk of rousing Mademoiselle Dantin's wrath. The Canoness shook her head, and said that, " if Mademoiselle Dantin was cross——"

" She will be delighted," interrupted her nephew.

Aunt Radegonde looked skeptical. " Mademoiselle Dantin detested to hear of those things."

" What things, aunt ?" he gravely asked.

Aunt Radegonde bridled up. " People might make mysteries if they liked, but other people were neither deaf nor blind yet." He smiled.

" Well, aunt," said he, " to please you——"

" To please me, Armand !"

" I mean to please you and Petite."

" To please us ! Armand, what do you mean ?"

" Nothing, aunt, since it pleases no one."

The Canoness looked baffled. She liked explanations and little scenes of the pathetic kind : her nephew shunned and detested them. Nathalie, resuming her old place, whispered that he was only jesting.

" Very unbecoming jesting," stiffly said aunt Radegonde.

But Monsieur de Sainville seriously declared this was no jest, but the conclusion of a very unbusiness-like interview which had formerly taken place between himself and Mademoiselle Montolieu concerning Mademoiselle Dantin's affairs. Nathalie, in a nettled tone, begged his pardon, and said that interview had struck her as very business-like indeed. He reminded her, with a smile, that she had never mentioned the intended purchase of Madame Ledru, and the damages that disappointed lady claimed, and hoped she would not now forget to inform the schoolmistress that he had altered his mind, and, owing to her great talents for business, had resolved to pay the required sum for the rickety house and strip of garden.

" I shall say nothing of the kind," replied Nathalie, looking exactly as she formerly looked when he had said something to provoke her.

All that the Canoness understood was that Mademoiselle Dantin was fast leading to a quarrel it was high time for her to check.

" Armand," she said, with much stateliness, " I am the head of the family, am I not ? Well, then, tell me your intentions with regard to Petite ?"

"Aunt, what a needless question!"

"Indeed, no. In explanations one is supposed to know nothing. and I am not aware that I do know any thing. Do you intend asking her to become your wife?"

"Yes, aunt, I do."

"Well, Petite," said the Canoness, looking down at Nathalie, "what will you answer?"

"I shall answer when I have been asked," was the demure reply.

"But, Petite, he means to ask you."

"So do I mean to reply."

The Canoness looked greatly provoked. "This came,' she hotly said, "of having any thing to do with lovers and their quarrels. They would still be at drawn daggers but for her, and instead of feeling grateful, they were in a plot to vex her." Her nephew suggested that she should begin over again; but she indignantly refused. "They might manage their own affairs now." But when, in spite of her faint resistance, Monsieur de Sainville kissed her hand, and when Nathalie pressed her lips to the averted cheek, the placable Canoness, who longed to yield, allowed herself to be persuaded. She said "she was much too easy, but it was time all this should end;" therefore, beseeching her nephew not to smile and Petite not to look foolish," she made a second trial, which met with exactly the same result as the first. Monsieur de Sainville would ask; Nathalie would reply when she had been asked.

"Again!" indignantly exclaimed the Canoness, and it took five minutes of coaxing on either side of her chair to soothe her offended dignity. At length she hit on an expedient.

In solemn and deliberate tone, and in the distinctly uttered name of Armand de Sainville, she asked Nathalie Montolieu in marriage; to which, in the name of the said Nathalie, she—after a pause given to that modest reflection suggested by propriety—uttered the most distinct and unequivocal "yes" maiden thus questioned ever spoke. She listened for a while to hear if any dissentient voice would be raised, but there was a profound silence.

"There!" she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief and a triumphant look, as she felt that the arduous matter was fairly settled. "There, it is all right, now; but I should like to know how you would have managed without me. Ah! you may well smile and look glad, foolish children. But you need not think it is all over, you have to hear me yet."

Both smiled at the expected homily. But of this the Canoness remained unconscious; she glanced with a complacent smile from her nephew to the young girl, and nodding at them with that mingled *bonhomie* and innocent vanity which formed the basis of her character, she thus addressed them:

"Children, it is well to marry and be fond of one another, but that is not enough."

"How can you tell, aunt?" asked her nephew, "you were never married."

"But I have observed, Armand, observed a great deal. Pray do not interrupt me again. You see," she resumed, "little quarrels are dangerous; affection dies of those pricks of a pin. I do not tell you, Petite, to obey Armand; I think it very ridiculous that men should command and women obey: but you see, my dear, he is older than you are; he has more experience and judgment; it will be well to yield sometimes, for when a man takes a young wife, and is subject to her caprices, he loses the respect of the world. Now, Petite, you must be jealous of your husband's reputation and honor—both are your own; do not forget it. As for you, Armand, I only say this: a woman is not a stone, but something with a heart. Be kind, and she will do as you wish; command, and she will either brave or deceive you. In short," added Aunt Radegonde, warming with her subject, "behave to her like a Christian and a gentleman; not like a Turk."

Thus pithily closed Aunt Radegonde's homily.

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CONCLUSION.

Six weeks had elapsed; to the profound amazement of the town of Sainville, and of the whole vicinity, Nathalie Montolieu had left the school of Mademoiselle Dantin for the château, and relinquished her maiden name for that of De Sainville.

This *mésalliance* was variously commented on. The general and most popular explanation was, that notwithstanding his years and experience, Monsieur de Sainville had allowed himself to be caught by a pretty face; ergo, that he was only a fool; and that though so young and seemingly heedless, Mademoiselle Montolieu was wonderfully expert in the difficult art of catching a rich husband. The tact with which she had transferred her designs from the nephew to his wealthy uncle was especially admired. A few foolish and romantic people did indeed venture to hint that Monsieur de Sainville was perhaps as wise as Monsieur de Chateaufort, who had married a plebeian *dot* of five hundred thousand francs, a plain person, and a sour temper; they even presumed to add that it was no actual crime to be young and pretty; and that a woman might love a man who happened to be rich and somewhat older than herself; but those persons were treated as such persons will be treated to the end of time: with the most entire contempt.

Every one, however, agreed in admiring the perfect unconcern with which Monsieur de Sainville and his wife endured the ironical surprise the announcement of their marriage had created, and it was decided on all hands that they had manifested a very fine *sang-froid*. But to this praise we regret to state that they were not entitled, having remained, not only unaware, but unsuspicious of the comments to which an event that appeared to them very simple and natural had given rise.

Monsieur de Sainville entertained for his own judgment, prudence, and forethought, that degree of respect with which most men are amply provided; it did not occur to him that he could do a foolish thing; he did not think that he had done a foolish thing in marrying Nathalie, and consequently did not imagine that the world might probably be of another opinion. Nathalie came to the same conclusion from different grounds. She had so sincere a respect for her husband—apart from the love she felt—she held him so superior in every thing to the younger men she had known, and they, to say the truth, were neither remarkable nor numerous, that she would have listened with incredulous surprise to the accusation of interested motives preferred against her. It would have seemed to her that there could exist but one motive for marrying Monsieur de Sainville, and that this motive must be as apparent to every mind as it was to her own.

The six weeks which elapsed had been marked by no important occurrence. There had, indeed, been some talk of one of those matrimonial tours of which the fashion, imported from England, has of late years become so prevalent in France; but Aunt Radegonde looked so perfectly miserable at the idea of remaining alone, Monsieur de Sainville evidently cared so little for this excursive sort of happiness awarded to the honeymoon, and Nathalie confessed so frankly that there was no place she liked so well as Sainville, that the plan was relinquished.

We know that a tale has, properly speaking, no right to extend beyond that fiat of a heroine's destiny, called marriage; and yet we must ask the reader to linger with us on the threshold of that old saloon into which he has so often been ushered, and to behold one last farewell picture.

Evening is drawing in. The chilly Canoness sits in her deep arm-chair by the fireside; Nathalie has been wrapping her up in a vast shawl, and placing a warm cushion under her little feet; they are alone.

"There," said Nathalie, in her cheerful voice, "you are quite right now, and can doze quietly."

"Doze, Petite; I wonder you can talk so childishly," was the somewhat pettish reply; "how often must I tell you that I do not doze after dinner, that I am only in a reflective mood?"

"But, aunt, why do you shut your eyes?"

"Because the light annoys me, you simple little thing."

Nathalie turned her head away to hide a furtive smile as her aunt closed her eyes to prepare for her after-dinner reflections; her regular breathing soon announced that those reflections were at least of a placid nature. Nathalie stood awhile on the hearth and then glided softly to one of the windows. It was a calm and chill evening. The moon was rising, but as yet her light was gray and indistinct, and the trees of the avenue cast faint and undefined shadows on the ground. Beyond rose the massive iron gate; and farther still extended the white and lonely road, winding away amongst green fields and solitary homesteads. It was that road which Nathalie followed in its farthest windings, as she stood in the embrasure of the window, her brow resting against the clear window-panes, the heavy curtain shrouding her in.

She was dreaming; not the feverish dreams which had once flushed the cheek and haunted the heart of the ardent girl; not these. Womanhood's calmer and holier visions were now hovering around her, for she was happy. Happiness is not, after all, so rare as it has often been represented; it exists and is met with, but accompanied with doubts and fears, that trouble its purest joys, and with sweet intoxicating hopes, that agitate still more deeply. It is the serene placid happiness that is a rare and brief sojourner on earth; the guest of a day, not so often banished by actual sorrow as the weariness of human hearts, too soon satiated with its pure and delightful presence. It was that still joy which now dwelt in the heart of Nathalie, and shed its divine peace over all her dreams. She did not feel hope, for hope implies desire, and every desire of her heart was fulfilled; she had not, as of yore, the longing wish to read and open the sealed book of the future; she had fixed her destiny on earth by solemn and irrevocable vows; and though she could not tell whether sorrow or happiness awaited her, she knew that there could be for her only one deep sorrow, even as there was only one deep happiness.

Of what, then, did she dream?

Of the quiet domestic joys of woman's household life; of her husband away, as he was this evening, and returning, as she expected he would return, on the morrow; of kind words and gentle caresses, of winter evenings by the fireside, of long summer mornings in the garden, and of a whole existence flowing on thus through years with the same calm and even tide. The change, the adventure, the romance she had once longed for no longer troubled her; the fever of her soul had won its long sought rest.

It was some time before she left the window and returned to the hearth. The Canoness was in a deep sleep; the fire shone with a warm and vivid glow. Nathalie sat down on a low stool; she smiled even to herself as she remembered the winter evenings thus spent, with a book on her lap that still remained unread; and then came back the memory of doubt, sorrow, and separation, of griefs poured forth on a sister's bosom, of the voice which had ever cheered her with pure and holy counsels, of the calm death-bed, and of the lonely grave in the narrow church-yard of Sainville. So absorbed was she in those recollections that she never heard the sound of a horse's hoofs in the avenue, nor, after a while, the drawing-room door opening. It was Monsieur de Sainville who entered. He paused for a moment on the threshold and looked at his wife. The fire-light fell on her features, youthful in spite of their present seriousness, and on her slender figure; her present attitude displaying more than usual its light girlish grace. Nathalie looked very pretty thus, and yet a strange pang shot across the bosom of Monsieur de Sainville as he gazed on her. He was still in the prime and vigor of life, but she was in all the early freshness of her years. It was not that he wished to add one day more to that existence as yet so brief, nor would he have seen without regret a severer line on that youthful brow; she charmed him thus, and as he felt, charmed him only too well; but in spite of himself, the lingering doubt would intrude that a day might come when Nathalie would repent her present choice, and wish she had chosen herself some younger mate.

He closed the door; Nathalie looked up, quickly rose to meet him, and there was something in the flush of glad surprise which lit up her face, in the irrepressible joy betrayed by every one of her expressive and animated features, that would have soothed a more irritable spirit, and charmed more painful doubts away. In youth, when the heart is naturally more generous, because it is more wealthy, the affection given is often the source of greater, and certainly purer happiness, than the love received; but as years steal on, as the heart, like a prodigal spendthrift, grows poor, selfish, and wearied, nothing can exceed the eager delight with which it receives the slightest tokens of a pure and sincere affection. This is a weakness against which judgment avails little, and bygone experience still less. Few had become more skeptical of human affections than Monsieur de Sainville; few had been more justified in their skepticism, and yet none, perhaps, ever yielded with more facility than he did to the pleasure of watching every emotion of the love he had at first unconsciously inspired, and then sedulously fostered in the heart of the young girl now his wife.

As he took a seat quietly, in order not to awaken his aunt, and Nathalie placed herself on the low stool at his feet, she did not say his unexpected return pleased her, but her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, the volubility of her piquant speech, the very restlessness of her movements, betrayed her joy; unexpressed, indeed, but to him how legible in the radiant face now raised towards his! And it was not merely the gladness his return inspired that pleased him, but still more the facility with which this Provençal nature yielded to pleasurable emotions, ever displaying that singular aptitude for happiness, if we may for once borrow a French idiom, which had struck and charmed him from the first.

To those who have lived much, whether prematurely or in the natural course of years, there is a deep attraction in the vivacity and buoyancy of younger minds and hearts. A placid, serene woman, far more perfect than Nathalie, would have failed in awakening the same feeling in Monsieur de Sainville, who was himself calm enough not to need that soothing but somewhat chill influence. Nathalie was to him as is to a traveller the summer breeze,—keen, fresh, and vivifying, but never cold, which tempers the fervid heat of noonday, and banishes the evening weariness of limbs and spirit.

She had ceased speaking, perhaps because she feared to awaken the sleeping Canoness; perhaps because other thoughts had come to her. Monsieur de Sainville bent down and looked into her face; the fire-light shone brightly on it; it was somewhat serious, yet no sad thoughts seemed to trouble her as she sat there on the hearth, her look on the glowing embers, her hands clasped around her knees.

"What are you thinking of?" asked her husband, placing his hand lightly on her shoulder.

She looked up slowly, and as slowly smiled.

"I was thinking," she replied, "that it is now two years since I entered this house—this room—and sat down where I am sitting now; strange that it should have taken two entire years to make me so happy."

"You are happy, then?"

"Very happy."

"And you have no doubt—no fear?"

"None—why should I?"

He looked at her almost sadly, but her smile remained bright, trusting, and undismayed.

"You are the same as ever," said he, "too hopeful. Come, confess that you look upon life, married life in particular, as a sort of perpetual sunshine."

"I think no such thing," was the dry and decisive reply; "I think, on the contrary, that it is extremely stormy."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed; but I have resolved one thing."

"And pray what is that thing?"

"That you shall have all the storms to yourself. You need not smile ironically: calm as you are, you know that I have found the way of putting you out of temper."

"Yes, Petite; but you were first very much out of temper yourself; if, therefore, the storms you predict take place, you will be——"

"A Griselidis—all patience, meek submission, and dutiful obedience."

A skeptical smile betrayed the doubt with which Monsieur de Sainville was disposed to treat this assertion; but Nathalie persisted.

"Indeed it will be as I say; and that because I know it will vex you thoroughly."

"This sounds frank; but pray how do you know it will vex me?"

"Because you like resistance, provided you can conquer it in the end; because you would wish me to storm, fret, and quarrel, whilst you remained cool as an icicle, and consequently always master. But as I am resolved not to give you this gratification, I have taken a dose of patience sufficient to last me through life."

"Well, since you confess to the amiable motive of wishing to vex me, I begin to believe this may be true."

"And you will give me credit for no other motive," asked Nathalie, a little seriously. "You do not think I could be patient from reason and principle if you happened to be stern and exacting; you do not think I could separate love from temper, and whilst I trusted in one, find it easy to endure the other?"

"Would you do that, Petite?"

"Yes, Armand, I would; for indeed you may believe me, mine is no weak and passing affection. I know that you are human, and that you have humanity's weaknesses; but I know also that you are upright and true; and if I love you much, I revere you not less. You need not look at me so wistfully: I cannot, I will not doubt. I said it already, this is no passing affection: it will not end with a few years; it will not be conquered by sorrow or death; it is as much a part of my being as is the immortal spirit within me, and like it, will it survive the storms and trials of existence, and pass beneath the dark portal of death to rejoice in the life and light of a purer day."

She ceased—tears had gathered in her dark eyes, and her smiling and parted lips quivered slightly. He made her no reply, but bending over her he laid his hand caressingly on the glossy and wavy tresses, and drew nearer to him that bowed and submissive head.

We will leave them thus. The Canoness is plunged in her deepest and most reflective mood; a mood which, alas! grows deeper and longer every evening; the wood-fire is burning brightly on the hearth; it lights the room with a warm genial glow; twilight has deepened into dusk; the red curtain is still undrawn; through the clear window-panes are seen the dark trees of the avenue; they rise against a sky of night's deepest azure: over all shines the moon—large, full, and radiant—her soft, clear light glides in through the casement, and falls upon the floor; it contrasts, but does not blend, with the red firelight.

And no other light seems to be needed for the sleep of age, or the dreams of love and youth. But, alas! there is only one there who is dreaming now: Monsieur de Sainville is indeed looking at his wife with true and serious tenderness; he loves her and has faith in her love; but he has not lived in vain; he knows the fallacy of hope, the weakness of humanity; the perishable nature of its deepest feelings; the freshness of Nathalie's hopes, the fervor of her faith cannot exist for him; and yet he is happy, for he can say "sufficient to each day is the evil thereof," and whilst the glad present shines over him, he will not sadden it with thoughts of the morrow's gloom.

But she who now sits at his feet with brow so serene, smile so hopeful, and look that seems to welcome such glorious visions,—has she those doubts, those fears? She has not.

"Hope with eyes so fair"

never wore a brighter aspect, when the poor poet, who died of grief, first beheld her. And hope is with her now; her glance undimmed by weeping, her beacon-light unquenched by the heavy night shadows. Nathalie is young; barely has she seen twenty years; she has suffered, but she forgets her past sorrow, to gaze on the future; it is beautiful and bright; she sees it as clearly as the light reflected in the mirror before her. She has heard that happiness is transient, that love is as delusive as the dream of a night; but the voice in her heart tells her another tale. Where others have found sorrow, she shall have deep joy, for Nathalie believes; her look, her attitude, are the very sublime of faith; there is not the shadow of a doubt on that clear brow, not the most remote mistrust in that upturned gaze. She is happy, and happy indeed does she look, sitting there at his feet, secure in the might and faith of her undying love.

Long may those bright hopes and warm feelings remain with her; long may they linger near her household hearth, and hallow it with their pure presence!

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